

Four's a Crowd

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Four's a Crowd

by [LuckyMagicBelle](#)

Summary

In exile, Tommy begins to hear voices. Voices that sound like Tubbo, Ranboo, and Purpled.

Tubbo, Ranboo and Purpled have no idea how they messed up time travel bad enough to end up in past-Tommy's head, but they're going to do everything in their power to save him.

Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

but it's loud in my head

Chapter Summary

The beginning of it all.

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: This work is purely fictional and not intended to represent any mental disorder.

TW: Referenced Abuse, Gaslighting

He was mining when it happened.

There was no warning. No flash of light, no loud noises, just him in the cave and then-- pain. Terrible, horrible, burning pain, so bright and hot that he was sure he was going to die.

He had distant recollections of writhing on the ground, clawing at the stone and screaming as his skull split apart. He didn't know how long he was there, only that by the time he had come back to himself, the torch he'd planted had almost burned out. Miraculously, no mobs had stumbled across him while he was helpless - small mercies.

The journey to the surface passed in a haze. Something was *wrong*-- his head felt both echoey and too full, like his brain had been inflated to four times its size and stuffed back into his skull.

"H-hello?"

Tommy froze in his tracks and whipped around. His vision swam with the movement, but he still managed to raise his iron pick. "Who's-- who's th're?" he slurred. He couldn't see anyone else, but he could have *sworn* he'd heard--

"Ranboo? Purpled?" The person sounded scared. *"Is that you?"*

Tommy wrinkled his nose. "It's TommyInnit to you, bitch."

There was a pause. And then Tommy flinched as a wave of pure emotional *agony* washed over him. The pick fell from his numb fingers and he collapsed, catching himself on his hands.

“What the *fuck*,” he gasped. His eyes were burning and he scrubbed at them, smearing a stripe of dirt across his face. “What the fuck-- why am I crying?!”

“*Tommy?*” the person asked. They sounded an awful lot like Tubbo. “*It’s really you?*”

“Of fucking course it’s me, who else would I be?” Tommy tried to sit up, only for another wave of *sorrow* to knock him over. “Fuck! Stop it, what the fuck are you doing?!”

“*I’m sorry,*” Not-Tubbo murmured. “*I just. . . it’s been a while since I’ve talked to you.*”

“*Tubbo?!*” Oh fuck, there were two of them. “*Tubbo, I can’t-- I can’t feel my body, what--*”

“*We’re in Tommy’s head.*”

Tommy blinked, the urge to cry pushed aside by his shock. “You’re fucking *what*.”

“. . . *Tommy?*” Voice #2 breathed. It sounded like Ranboo, so Tommy decided to dub it Not-Ranboo. “*We-- we did it? The portal worked?*”

“Yes,” Not-Tubbo said, though he sounded unhappy. “*We’re back, but. . . not where we’re supposed to be.*”

“*Just be glad we didn’t overwrite him,*” a third voice cut in. Tommy felt terror bloom in his chest, followed by a rush of relief. He grimaced and raised a hand to his ribs, trying to tamp down the foreign emotions.

“What the *fuck*,” he gritted out, blinking the last tears from his eyes. “What the fuck is happening. Who are you. Why are you in my head.”

All three voices gave off the impression of being startled. “*Ah,*” said Voice #3. They sounded familiar, but Tommy couldn’t place a name. “*Uh, you see-- screw it, Tubbo, you explain.*”

“*You really threw me under the minecart, huh?*” Not-Tubbo (Tubbo?) complained. “*So, uh, hi Tommy. We’re from the future.*”

“Uh-huh,” Tommy said. So he was hallucinating now. Cool.

The voices apparently felt his disbelief. “*We really are,*” Not-Ranboo said. “*I’m Ranboo. Tubbo and Purpled are here too.*”

“Uh-huh,” Tommy repeated. “If you’re from the future, why’d you come back, and why the fuck are you in my head?”

A sharp pang of *fear-anger-pain* shot through his chest. Great, his emotions were on the fritz too. He really was losing it. “*The future was. . . bad,*” Not-Tubbo started. Voice #3 (Purpled, if Not-Ranboo was to be believed) let out a scoff.

“*Stop trying to sugarcoat it. A lot of people were dead, we were alive, we found a portal blueprint to go back in time but screwed it up and landed in your head.*”

“Not on purpose,” Not-Tubbo said miserably. *“I’m sorry, Tommy. We didn’t mean to drag you into this mess.”*

Tommy narrowed his eyes. There were two possibilities here. Either 1) he’d finally gone insane and was now hallucinating voices, or 2) he really had three time travelers stuck in his head. Given the muted waves of emotion that were *not-his*, he was leaning towards the second. Besides, he knew he could dream up Tubbo and Ranboo - but *Purpled*? He hadn’t seen the guy in *ages*.

(More than that, he *wanted* to believe it. He wanted to believe that he wasn’t alone anymore.)

“Okay,” he said aloud, then snorted at the three bursts of *surprise-shock-relief* that went off in his chest. “I believe you.”

“J-just like that?” Not-Ranboo-- *Future-* Ranboo asked.

“Just like that,” Tommy confirmed. “But I’m gonna need to call you something else, because-- because, uh, your present selves--”

“You can always just call my present self ‘bitch’.”

Tommy let out a surprised cackle. Future-Tubbo bloomed with glee. “Okay then, bitch it is--”

“We’re not calling your past self Bitch,” Future-Purpled deadpanned. *“Just call yourself. . . Underscore, or something. That’s your last name, isn’t it?”*

Underscore gave off the distinct impression of sulking. *“You’re no fun.”*

Future-Ranboo shifted. *“In that case, um--”*

“I’m not calling you Beloved, boob boy.” Tommy sat back on his heels and crossed his arms.

“But--”

“Maybe I should just call you ‘boob boy’.”

“Please don’t,” Ranboo sighed. *“What about just. . . Boo?”*

*“Ex-cuse you, **I’m** the only one allowed to call you that--”*

“Tubbo.”

Underscore huffed. *“No. Call him Ran.”*

“And I’ll just be Purpled,” Purpled cut in. *“My younger self wasn’t. . . involved a lot, so we should be fine.”*

Tommy grinned. “Violeted.”

“No.”

“Lavendered.”

“*Stop it.*”

“Fuschiaed.”

“*That’s not even a shade of purple.*”

“*I mean, it’s technically reddish-purple--*”

“*Shut up, Ranboo. Ran.*” Purpled huffed. “. . . *Where are we?*”

"Cave," Tommy answered. He pushed himself to his feet, leaning on his pickaxe. "I was mining when you-- wait, you can see?"

"Through your eyes. Kinda weird, actually. We can see things, but we can't feel shit." Underscore sighed. "**Really** weird."

Ran's presence stilled. *"Wait, you know me. You know my last name."*

Tommy narrowed his eyes. "Yeah. . . ? I don't have memory problems, boob boy."

*"You **know** me,"* Ranboo repeated.

"Oh," Underscore breathed. *"I-- Tommy, where are you? **When** are you?"*

Tommy's hands tightened around his pickaxe. "Well, uh, I got exiled. About. About a month ago."

Icy dread crept into his heart. *"By who?"*

"I think we already know," Purpled said. *"You're under Logstedshire, aren't you?"*

Tommy's silence was answer enough.

Something sharp and unnameable curled in his chest. *"Shit,"* Underscore hissed. *"Shit. We missed-- we're too late."*

"We can still save some," Purpled said. *"We'll have to scrap our previous plans, but--"*

The torch nearest Tommy sputtered and died. A glance showed that the others lining the tunnel were close to burning out as well.

". . . We'll talk about this later."

"I haven't been to Logstedshire in a while," Ran piped up, obviously eager to get aboveground. *"Can you show us around?"*

Tommy snorted, stomping down his discomfort and swinging the pickaxe over his shoulder. "Yeah, sure. I'll give you guys the full tour. You can talk about time travel shit later."

“Welcome to Logstedshire,” Tommy deadpanned. He waved an arm at the pile of logs sitting against the wall. “Population ten percent human and ninety percent dead trees. We may be small, but we’ve got the best fucking tourism industry on the SMP.”

“*Woooooooo*,” Tubbo cheered, ignoring the burgeoning unease sweeping across the mindscape. “*Dead trees! We love dead trees!*”

“This here is my house,” Tommy announced. He gestured towards the wooden building, then hesitated. “I mean. . . technically it’s Ghostbur’s, but he hasn’t been back in a while. So. My house now, bitch!”

Unfortunately, his usual strategy of ‘I’m definitely not hurt at all’ was less effective when his audience could feel his emotions.

“*Oh, Tommy,*” Ran said, and Tommy grimaced as a tangle of *guilt-love-frustration* smacked him in the face. “*You’re not-- he--*” he scrambled with his words for a moment, then sighed. “*Ghostbur. . . he, in the future, he told us that Dream told him that you didn’t want to see him anymore.*”

Tommy went still. “He. . . what?”

“*Dream tricked him.*”

Tommy shook his head. “No, you-- you’ve got it wrong. Dream wouldn’t do that.”

“*You don’t believe that.*”

Tommy felt a brief snap of irritation. He *knew* Dream, far better than the three voices in his head. Dream would never intentionally hurt him, and even if he did, he always had a good reason. He glared at the grass beneath his feet.

“Dream’s not like that,” he insisted. “Ghostbur just forgot about me. Like he forgets about everything else.”

“*He didn’t,*” Underscore murmured. “*He loved-- **loves** you, he didn’t--*”

“Tommy?”

Twin bolts of *surprise-fear-rage* shot through him. Tommy whipped around. “Dr-Dream!”

Dream stood at the gate of Logstedshire, decked out in full netherite. He cocked his head. “Hey, Tommy. What are you doing?”

“Uh--” Tommy blanked, scrambling for an excuse while trying to beat down the slew of volatile emotions Underscore and Ran were sending his way. “Talking!”

Shit. That wasn't what he wanted to say. Dream showed no outward change, but Tommy could *feel* the temperature dropping. "Oh? To who?"

"*Yourself*," Purpled barked. "*Say yourself!*"

"Your-- myself," Tommy stuttered, fumbling through the word and the increasing number of expletives crowding his brain. "Yeah. Myself."

Dream didn't react for a few seconds. When he spoke, his voice was soft. ". . . You're not lying to me, right?"

Tommy felt the other three reel back as his *fear-guilt-fear* washed over them. "No!" he blurted. "No, Dream, I'd never lie to you--"

"Good. Friends don't lie to each other."

Tommy winced as three spikes of rage-tinted surprise stabbed into his brain. "***Friends?***" Underscore shrieked. "*What the f--*"

"*Shhh*," Purpled hissed. "*Wait until Dream is gone. Tommy needs to focus.*"

Tommy zoned back in to find Dream *right in front of him*, hand raised. He flinched back, bracing himself for a blow, but Dream just tilted his head and lowered his hand. "Tommy?" he asked, less accusatory and more worried. "Are you. . . okay?"

Tommy couldn't help the sparks of *relief-happiness-warmth* that rose in his chest. Underscore slammed them down with a wave of anger. "*He's faking, Tommy*," he snapped. "*He doesn't care about you, don't--*"

"*Tubbo*," Ran whispered. Underscore fell silent.

"I'm uh," Tommy rubbed his head. "Y-yeah, I'm. I'm fine. Doing okay."

If anything, Dream just looked *more* concerned. He reached out and laid a hand across Tommy's forehead. "Are you sick?"

Tommy melted into the touch, only for Underscore's slew of *disgust-rage-hatehatehate* to rise in his throat. He took a deep breath and tried to shake it off, straightening and staggering a few steps away. "No, no," he breathed, glaring into the grass as he sent a pointed jab of annoyance at Underscore. "I'm fine. Really."

Dream stared at him. Tommy held his breath, begging Dream to let it go.

"Alright then," the man said at last. "But, Tommy. . . you know you can tell me anything, right?"

"Yeah," Tommy lied. "I'm serious, though. I'm fine. Great. Amazing, actually. How've you been?"

The distraction worked. Dream turned away and began chattering about a particularly nasty ghaſt he'd encountered in the Nether.

Tommy remained subdued throughout the viſit, the voices leaving him ſnappier than uſual. He knew Dream could tell that ſomething was wrong, but the man didn't push or try to weasel more answers. He was giving Tommy ſpace, waiting for when he'd feel comfortable enough to talk. Unfortunately, any appreciation Tommy could feel froſted over under the icy reſentment Underscore exuded.

Things came to a head towards the end of the viſit. "I have to go ſoon," Dream ſaid. He took out a ſhovel. "You know what that means."

". . . Yeah." Tommy watched as Dream dug into the dirt, carving a ſhallow pit. The voices ſhifted, projecting confuſion until Dream pulled out a bundle of TNT.

"Put your things in the hole, Tommy."

His head went terrifyingly ſilent. Tommy huffed in reſignation, already moving forward-- only to ſtagger when a ſpiral of pure *rage* exploded in his cheſt.

*"That fucking **bastard**,"* Underscore ſnarled, all horror and anguiſhed fury. *"You-- he-- that's what he did on the mountain! He-- he was reminding-- **Tommy**-- "*

"Tommy," Dream repeated. Tommy flinched and haſtily tugged his helmet off.

"Sorry, ſorry," he ſaid. The cheſtplate came off next. "I zoned out."

Dream hummed. "Juſt pay attention when I'm talking to you, yeah?"

"Yeah. Sorry, Dream. I'll do better."

Underscore's preſence ſtilled, coaleſcing into ſomething cold and ſharp. *"I'm going to murder him."*

"Calm down," Purpled warned. *"We can't do anything right now."*

Tommy tossed his laſt block into the hole, praying that nothing was ſhowing on his face. "That's everything."

Dream lit a match and dropped it. Tommy haſtily ſtepped back, raising his hands to protect his head from the reſulting blaſt. His ears rang in the ſilence that followed. Slowly, he lowered his arms and ſtared at the crater. It was becoming a familiar ſight.

A hand landed on his ſhoulder. "I'll be back in five days," Dream ſaid. "See you ſoon, Tommy."

". . . Yeah," Tommy ſaid. He tore his gaze from the ſmoking debris, lips twitching into a ſmile he didn't feel. "See you ſoon."

Dream gave him one last pat on the shoulder and departed. Tommy watched until he disappeared into the trees, then sat down on the sand and hugged his knees to his chest. His shoulder burned where Dream had touched him and he shivered, wrapping his arms a bit tighter around himself.

"We're here for you," Ran said, pressing forwards. Underscore's frigid aura softened at his words, melting into something like comfort.

"Yeah," he agreed. *"Ignore that bastard, Tommy. You're gonna make it out of this."*

Tommy remained silent, letting the conflicted knot of emotions curled behind his ribs speak for itself.

It took a lot of trial and error for them to figure out how to work together.

First order of business: stop sharing emotions. Tommy did *not* need the other three to feel his *terror-terror-terror* when he woke up screaming. Nor did he need to feel Underscore's grief or Purpled's stress or the stupid *mushiness* Ran kept throwing around. They didn't mean to do it, of course, but that didn't mean it wasn't *fucking annoying*.

Purpled figured it out first. *"It's like a wall,"* he explained. *"Just imagine building a wall around yourself."*

"Easier said than done," Underscore grumbled, his irritation bouncing across their mindscape. Tommy snapped the pick handle he'd been trying to fix. He stared at the splintered wood in dismay.

"Oops. Sorry."

"Maybe we shouldn't try this while Tommy's doing things," Ran suggested. Tommy huffed and tossed the ruined handle away.

"You think?"

Hurt flashed hot in their chest. Ran scrambled to pull it back. *"Ah- no, sorry--"*

"I didn't mean it like that," Tommy blurted, smacking the other three square in the face with a wave of *guilt*. *"Shit-- fuck--"*

He ended up huddled against the outer wall of Logstedshire, forehead pressed to his knees.

"Start with wood," Purpled advised. *"Just imagine putting up a fence around yourself."*

"A fence," Ran repeated with a shaky voice. His unrelenting flow of *guilt-sorrow-frustration* thinned slightly, his focus distracting him from the negative emotions. *"I think. . . I think I'm"*

getting it."

At that moment, Underscore's shoddy fence snapped apart. Ran's glow of elation disappeared under a tidal wave of irritation. Tommy responded in kind, resentment whipping across their headspace before he could yank it back. He dug his nails into the dirt and gnashed his teeth, breathing through the feedback loop of *frustration*.

"*Oops,*" Underscore muttered, sounding strained. "*Sorry-- let me--*" The tide of emotion ebbed and wavered for about three seconds before shooting up again.

Purpled sighed. "*This is going to take a while.*"

a little thing called happiness

Chapter Summary

They figure out a few things about sharing a body.

Chapter Notes

TW: Exile Arc, Mentioned Character Death

“Phiil,” Tommy called, knocking on the door. “Philza Minecraft, it’s time to wake up.”

No answer.

“Phil?” Tommy knocked again, brow furrowed. “Phil, it’s our turn to cook. You know how Purpled gets when he doesn’t get coffee.”

Silence. Tommy’s heart sank.

“I’m coming in,” he warned. He turned the knob and pushed the door open revealing a ruffled bed - its occupant absent.

Tommy stood in the doorway for a moment, a pit opening in his stomach. “. . . Phil?”

The empty room gave no reply.

His eye caught on a slip of paper, sitting innocently on the pillow. Tommy swallowed, then approached it and picked it up.

leaving. don’t look for me. I can still save him, I know it.

“Tubbo,” he whispered. His hands were shaking. “TUBBO!”

A door slammed open down the hall. Tubbo tumbled into the room, netherite armor thrown haphazardly over his pajamas and hands clutching an axe. He paused, taking in the scene, then lowered the weapon and hurried over to him. “Ranboo? What happened?”

“Phil’s gone,” Tommy said. He held out the slip of paper.

Tubbo took it. He read it, read it again, then crumpled it in his fist.

“Tubbo, we have to go after him.”

Tubbo shook his head.

“Tubbo--”

“He’s made his decision, Ranboo.” Tubbo turned to him, eyes dark. “We can’t risk going out there.”

Tommy inhaled. His eyes were burning. He couldn’t cry, not now, not again. “Tubbo, please, he’s--”

“You knew he couldn’t stay here.” Tubbo said. His words were harsh, but his voice was pitying. “It would have killed him.”

Tommy’s hands were trembling. He reached up to fist them in his shirt, unable to stop the pained warble that clawed its way out of his throat.

*Tubbo opened his arms. Tommy fell into the hug and **sobbed**.*

Tommy woke up to the sound of his own breathing and a terrible ache in his heart. He blinked at the ceiling through blurry vision, trying to recall what he’d been dreaming about.

Someone stirred in the back of his mind, close to waking but not quite alert. Their grief poured out of them in waves. Tommy raised a hand to his face, unsurprised when tears slid across his fingertips.

He turned over, buried his face in his pillow, and sunk back into sleep.

“Hey, Purpled.”

“What do you want.”

Tommy snorted. “Fuck man, you don’t need to sound so defensive.”

“I mean--”

“Fuck off boob boy, nobody asked for your opinion. Purpled, you built a UFO right?”

“. . . Yes.”

“Teach me.”

“Teach you?”

“How to make a UFO.”

There was a long moment of silence. “*Why would I do that?*”

“Because I want a UFO.”

“*That’s not a reason.*”

Tommy glared at the ground. “If you don’t, I’ll make the UFO out of cobblestone.”

“*That’s--*” Purpled sounded like he was in physical pain, or as close to it as he could get with that monotone voice of his. “*You can’t--*”

“It’s *my* UFO, bitch,” Tommy sniffed. Yeah, he knew it would be ugly - but if he didn’t put too much effort into it, it would less when it inevitably got destroyed. “I get to decide what it’s made of.”

Purpled made a noise between a huff and a sigh, then paused. “*Wait,*” he said. “*You can’t make a cobblestone UFO if I don’t give you the blueprints.*”

Tommy narrowed his eyes at the sea. “Don’t you fucking *dare.*”

“*Or what?*”

“Or. . . or. . .” Tommy hesitated, struggling to think of a threat that he could carry out against someone who was literally in his head.

“*Exactly,*” Purpled said. If he had a face, he’d probably be smirking. Bastard. “*So either build the UFO how it’s supposed to be built, or-- LOOK OUT!*”

Tommy looked up in time just to notice a creeper literally *two feet away*. The smell of gunpowder was already thick in the air, and for a moment, all Tommy could see was Dream, green cloak the same color as the creeper’s fur.

Tommy froze. The voices were shouting in the back of his head, probably trying to get him to *move* before the creeper exploded, but his limbs felt like they were made of stone. So this is how he’d die. Not in a glorious battle, like he’d always imagined, but in disgrace, exiled from the country he had given two lives and his heart for.

And then everything *wrenched*. Tommy stared in disbelief as his body threw itself back just as the creeper exploded. He could *see* everything as he went tumbling head over heels, but despite the burns on his forearms and chest he *couldn’t feel anything*.

“Ow,” his body hissed. “Ow that *stings.*”

“*What. . .*” Tommy croaked. “*What the fuck?*”

His body went still. Tommy watched as his gaze lowered towards his hands.

“. . . Tommy?”

“*What the fuck,*” he repeated.

“*Oh,*” someone said. If he had a physical body, Tommy would have jumped. As it was, he sent a spike of alarm ricocheting through the headspace. The *presence* beside him yelped. “*Calm down!*”

“*I didn’t know we could-- do that,*” a second *presence* muttered. “*Purpled, are you-- is everything okay?*”

“*Purpled?*” Tommy demanded.

“Yes, that’s-- me,” Tommy’s body said. Fuck. Purpled was controlling Tommy’s body. Tommy was in-- in his mind? Wherever the fuck the voices usually were. Purpled was *controlling Tommy’s body*. What the fuck.

“*This is fucked up,*” he said. Purpled winced.

“Sorry,” he said. “Sorry. I didn’t mean to. I just-- *reached*, I don’t know how to describe it, and-- well.”

“*Okay,*” Tommy said as calmly as he could, which was pointless because everyone could feel his rising panic. “*Think you could undo it?*”

“Yeah, sorry-- just let me--”

Everything *wrenched* again, and then the pain slammed into him full force.

“*Ow,*” he groaned. “Fuck you’re right, it *stings*.”

Ran, who he had now identified as the first *presence*, let out a wave of sympathy. “*Pour a bit of cool water on a cloth and dab it on the burns, then bandage them up.*”

“Thanks, big man,” Tommy muttered. Hopefully he’d have himself fixed up by the time Dream came back.

“*Sorry,*” Purpled said.

Tommy bit the inside of his cheek, jerking the bandage around his forearm a little tighter. “I . . . just-- warn me next time.”

There was a pause. “*Next time?*” Underscore asked.

Tommy huffed. “I’m not stupid. As long as you’re in my head, the chances of this happening again are pretty fucking high.”

“*That’s--*” Ran started, then fell silent.

Tommy flexed his arms, satisfied when the bandages held. “Okay, enough emotional shit. Purpled! Gimme the blueprints for the UFO, or I’ll get a stupid song stuck in my head.”

Purpled hung back, for once reluctant to ignore the metaphorical elephant in the room. Funny. Usually he was the most emotionally constipated person in their four-man circus. “*Tommy--*”

“No. I’m not thinking about this right now. Help me build.”

“*. . . Okay.*”

The other three politely ignored Purpled’s flash of guilt-tinged relief.

“*No, not there-- **there**, a block to the left-- yes.*”

“You know,” Tommy huffed without thinking, “You could just build this for me.”

“No,” Purpled deadpanned, right before his mind caught up with what Tommy had said. He stuttered, the easy banter passing between them screeching to a halt. “*I-- I’m don’t-- I’m not helping you with this monstrosity any more than I have to.*”

“*It would be good practice,*” Underscore murmured. “*In. . . in case we have to take control in. . . emergencies.*”

An uneasy silence descended upon the four of them.

“*. . . Tommy,*” Underscore said, unusually serious. “*Are you okay with us piloting?*”

Tommy stared down at the block in his hands. On one hand, losing control of his body - really, the last thing he still had control over - was terrifying.

On the other hand, the three voices didn’t have their own bodies. They deserved to have a chance to feel the outside world again.

They must have felt his conflict, because Underscore rushed forward to assure him. “*It’s okay, Tommy. If you don’t want us to, we won’t.*”

“No, it’s. . .” Tommy bit the inside of his cheek and made his decision. “Just. . . ask first, yeah? And tell me what you’re gonna do.”

“*Are you-- are you sure?*”

Ran shifted uncomfortably. “*Tommy, really. If you’re uncomfortable--*”

“I’m not,” Tommy blurted. “I’m-- okay, yeah, I am, but-- you guys deserve--”

*"It's **your** body, Tommy."*

Strangely enough, their attempts to convince him that he didn't have to share reassured him. He-- didn't *trust* them, per se, but he didn't think they would hurt him.

(Because somewhere in the four days he'd known them, they'd become his friends.

Because somehow in the four days he'd known them, he felt happier than he had in the past *month*.)

"It's fine," he said. "As long as you guys ask before-- beforehand. If you try anything funny, I'll just punt you back."

A pause. Underscore and Ran were both radiating uncertainty, but Purpled had drawn back and started projecting a strange mix of excitement and guilt.

"Okay, enough sappy shit," Tommy blurted. "Purpled! Build this shit for me!"

". . . Are you sure?"

Tommy rolled his eyes, batting away the trickle of reluctance. "Yeah. C'mon."

A funny tingling feeling spread across his skin. Tommy could feel himself. . . drifting, for lack of a better word, slipping backwards in a motion halfway between floating and sliding. He could still see, but he felt disconnected, unable to feel his body.

It wasn't scary, just strange. If he relaxed, it became oddly peaceful.

"Tommy?" Purpled adjusted his grip on the cobblestone block. Half of their vision went dark as his left eye slid shut. "Is this okay?"

"Yeah," Tommy murmured. *"S good, but why are you doing that?"*

"What?"

"With your eye?"

"My--" Purpled reached up to touch his eyelid. Something unpleasant rose in the back of their throat. ". . . Oh. I, uh, had one eye in the future, so this is just. . . habit."

"Huh," Tommy said. There was obviously some trauma associated with that, a can of worms he had no intention of opening. *"Cool."*

Purpled made a vague noise of agreement. ". . . Are you *sure* you're okay with this?"

"I already said yes, bitch."

"Okay. Fine. Let me know if you want to switch back."

"Will do. Now shut up and build."

There was a pause. Purpled lifted the cobblestone block, and Tommy could *feel* his distaste.

“ . . . Do I have to build it with cobblestone?”

“Yes.”

“*Just do it, Purpled,*” Underscore chirped. “*He’ll give us hell otherwise.*”

Purpled huffed. “C’mon, just a bit of *tasteful* decorating--”

“*Ninety-nine bottles of beer on the wall!*” Tommy belted out in his most annoying soprano voice. He was pleasantly surprised to find that mental voices could be manipulated past normal physical limits, and proceeded to add an unholy amount of reverb. “*Ninety-nine bottles of beer! Take one down, pass it around--*”

“Fine, okay, okay! I’ll use cobblestone!”

Dream stared up at the cobblestone monstrosity in the sky. “What the fuck?”

“It’s my UFO,” Tommy informed him. “It’s the poggest UFO in the world.”

Purpled began retching in the back of his head. Tommy made the executive decision to ignore him.

“It’s. . . nice,” Dream said in a voice that meant it was anything but. “Very aesthetic.”

Tommy beamed. “Thanks! So how’s shit going for you?”

“It’s going good,” Dream answered. He glanced over his shoulder. “I’m on a bit of a schedule today. I can’t stay long.”

The shoddy wooden walls Ran and Underscore had slammed down around their emotions creaked dangerously. Tommy’s smile faltered. “. . . Oh. Okay. Good luck.”

“Thanks.” Dream gestured at the hole he’d dug. “Before I go, if you could. . .?”

“Right, sorry,” Tommy blurted. He began to strip his armor off.

“*Don’t--*” Underscore started, only to draw in on himself when Ran let out a flare of panic.

“*He has to,*” Purpled muttered. “*We can’t let Dream know.*”

The man in question seemed distracted, remaining silent as Tommy emptied his inventory into the hole. He lit the TNT with less flair than usual and tossed it in without a second glance. Tommy stared at the fuse as it burnt down, hypnotized by the dancing light.

His legs moved without permission, jumping back just as the TNT exploded. Tommy let out a curse as he regained control, flailing to keep his balance. He winced when Dream turned his gaze towards him.

“Don’t stand so close, Tommy. You could get hurt.”

“Oh yeah, and who’s fault would th--”

“Tubbo.”

The burns on his chest and forearms stung. Tommy plastered a smile on his face. “Yeah, sorry. I’ll be more careful.”

Dream hummed in acknowledgement and turned away with a wave of his hand. Tommy remained still until he disappeared from view.

“Okay,” he hissed once the man was out of sight. “Which one of you fuckers snatched my legs?”

Underscore’s building rage vanished in a blast of surprise, followed by hysterical laughter.

“Erm,” Ran said. “Sorry. I, uh, I guess I snatched your legs? Y-you weren’t moving, I didn’t ask, I’m sorry--”

“Be grateful he gave them back,” Purpled deadpanned.

Underscore began cackling even harder.

Tommy sighed. “I . . . it’s okay, Ranboo. Ran. Shit.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Why the fuck do you apologize so much?”

Underscore snorted. *“He’s got no spine.”*

“I do have a spine,” Ran protested.

“Made out of chocolate éclair, maybe.”

“I want a divorce.”

Tommy stopped in his tracks. “Divorce?”

“They’re married,” Purpled said.

“They’re *what?!* ”

“So. Yeah.”

Tommy stared at the wall. “You married Ranboo for tax purposes.”

“Yep.”

“And then you adopted a child.”

“Uh-huh.”

Tommy buried his face in his hands. “Tubbo, what the *fuck*.”

Underscore laughed, loud and just a touch hysterical. Ran sighed.

“I miss Michael. He was the most sane one in the family.”

“So what *was* the future like?” Tommy winced as the emotional equivalent of a brick wall slammed into him, shutting him off from the other three. “It was shit, huh.”

“It wasn’t. . . all bad,” Purpled offered. *“We had a hideout. A bunker of sorts.”*

“Had its own farm and everything,” Underscore murmured. *“Tommy built it himself. Said he. . . said he learned it from Technoblade.”*

Gloomy silence descended upon them. Tommy gnawed on the inside of his cheek, hands twisting the fabric of his shirt.

He shouldn’t ask. He really shouldn’t. But he wanted to know.

“What. . . what happened to me?”

Underscore’s presence shrank in his mind. Ran floundered, barely staying afloat in the sudden grief that swamped them.

“You died,” Purpled said. Clinical. Detached. Tommy flinched. *“It killed you.”*

“What’s ‘it’?”

Purpled hesitated, but Ran answered for him. *“The Crimson.”*

“. . . Shit name.”

“You wouldn’t say that if you saw it.”

Ominous. Tommy decided to move past that before he poked the sleeping bear that was Trauma again.

“So!” he blustered, standing abruptly and brushing imaginary dirt off his knees - completely unnecessary, since he hadn’t been on his knees in the first place. “Whaddya say we, uh, go

mining!”

Ran jumped on the topic change, something like relief seeping into their mindscape. “*We went mining yesterday.*”

“*And the day before that,*” Underscore added.

“Gotta fill up my daily quota,” Tommy joked, painfully aware of the ache in his chest because *he didn’t have much else to do out here*. Ran and Underscore kept up their light-hearted grumbling, not appearing to notice.

Tommy let his shoulders relax.

Seems his own walls were holding.

Tommy returned from the mining expedition with the feeling that something was *off*.

The three voices were tense too, their metaphorical eyes peeled for the source of their unease. The beach didn’t look any different - no mysterious footprints, no new craters or signs of any mobs - but Tommy could *feel* that something had changed.

“*Might just be our combined paranoia,*” Underscore suggested. “*We’ve all got a lot of it.*”

“Don’t think so,” Tommy muttered. He shuffled into Logstedshire, then stopped in his tracks. “Oh,” he said aloud. “Someone visited me while I was gone.”

A sign rose from the ground beside the Prime Bell, inscribed with Eret’s elegant calligraphy. The sign posted on the wall beside it had been signed by Antfrost.

Ran slid forward, wariness replaced with curiosity. “*They left presents.*”

“Too much of a pussy to give them to me themselves,” Tommy grumbled. He dug a shovel into the disturbed dirt beside the Prime Log. “Let’s see whatever the fuck they left.”

An Enderchest. Of fucking course it was an Enderchest. Tommy had never felt more offended in his life.

“Eret’s a fucking prick,” he snarled, scooping up the Enderchest and shoving into his inventory. He batted aside Underscore’s sparks of amusement. “He is! Bastard thinks I can’t make my own--”

He turned around and met big, brown eyes.

“*Oh,*” Ran whispered, and a dizzying rush of delight flooded through them.

A mooshroom stood nearly nose to chest with him, tethered to a pole with a long lead. A quick glance at the sign left behind showed her to be the gift from Antfrost. Tommy wasn't sure how he'd missed her on his way into Logstedshire, but he wasn't about to complain.

"Hey girl," he cooed, reaching out to run a hand across the mooshroom's hand. The cow let out a moo in return, plodding forward and nosing his chest. Ran devolved into a mess of garbled noises and bursts of *joy-joy-joy*.

"*You're an animal person, huh,*" Purpled deadpanned, but his voice was a touch less monotone than usual. "*I should have known.*"

Underscore poked Tommy with a bit of concentrated curiosity. "*What're you going to call her?*"

Tommy took a step back to inspect his new companion. "Mushroom Henry," he decided. "That's her name now."

"*Mmm,*" Ran hummed. Tommy was pretty sure that if he still had a tail, it would be swishing back and forth. "*Mushroom. Mushroom Henry. I love her.*"

"You can touch her, if you want."

Ran stilled, snapping back to attention. ". . . *You-- you mean--*"

Tommy shrugged, keeping his eyes fixed on his hands. Ran's waves of warmth cooled slightly, tempered with nerves and concern.

"*You're. . . really okay with it?*"

"Yeah." And he really was okay with it. He'd gladly step back for an hour if it meant Ran could keep feeling as happy as he'd just felt.

Ran's reluctance brightened into something like hope. He edged forward, cautious. Tommy rolled his eyes. In one swift motion, he fell back and shoved Ran forward, straight into the front. Ran, unprepared for the sudden motion, yelped as he tripped over his feet and fell on his hands and knees. "Tommy--" he started as he sat back, only to freeze when Mushroom Henry nudged him.

"Oh," he breathed. Ever so gently, he reached out, running his hands over Mushroom Henry's velveteen head. The mooshroom closed her eyes, settling down and laying her head in his lap.

Something soft and warm and so beautiful it *ached* filled their chest. "You're so beautiful," Ran cooed, voice trembling as he nuzzled the mooshroom's head. "Who's the most beautiful girl?"

She mooed, soft and content. A low, happy rumble filled the air.

"*He's-- is he purring ?*" Tommy asked incredulously. "*I thought it was an enderman thing! How the fuck is he doing that with my vocal cords?*"

“You’d be surprised how similar human and enderman anatomy is,” Underscore said. “Did you know that endermen have the same number of vertebrae as humans, but they’re longer so their spines aren’t as flexible?”

“No, and I didn’t ask.”

“Nobody did.”

Tommy sent a bright spark of approval Purpled's way. Purpled responded with fond amusement.

“Rude,” Underscore huffed, but his emotions were nothing but warm. Together, the three of them watched as Ran made a new friend.

Tommy stared at the cat. The cat blinked, yawned, and curled up tighter on the chair.

*On **his** chair.*

“Ranboo.”

Ranboo popped into the room in a shower of purple particles. “Did you say my name? Sorry, I was in the kitchen so I wasn’t sure--”

Tommy pointed at the cat. “Your cat.”

“My-- oh, Enderpearl!” He scooped Enderpearl off the armchair, ignoring her displeased yowl. “Sorry, she was on your chair again, wasn’t she?”

Tommy offered him a deadpan stare and hobbled over to his chair, lowering himself into it. Ranboo’s smile dimmed as his gaze strayed to Tommy’s leg, but he didn’t comment on it.

“I’ll get you your coffee,” he said instead. He set Enderpearl down on the floor and disappeared in another burst of purple. Tommy was left to stare at the cat, who wandered over, plopped down, and began batting at his shoelaces.

“Stop,” he said. The cat looked up at him, almost defiantly. She mewled and returned to batting at his laces.

Tommy huffed. Unbidden, a small smile fought its way onto his face, breaking through his impassive facade. He reached down and patted her on the head. Enderpearl stopped playing with his laces, instead flopping over his sneaker with a pleased purr.

He usually preferred dogs, but cats weren’t too bad either.

A burst of purple to his left startled him. Tommy instinctively jerked back--

Tommy rolled right off the bed and hit the ground with a crash. The resulting outpouring of expletives woke the other three inhabitants of his skull, though they came to awareness with far more grace than Tommy himself had managed.

"What's wrong?" Purpled asked, his wariness sending bolts of adrenaline through Tommy's system. *"Who's attacking?"*

"My blankets," Tommy grumbled, glowering at the cloth wrapped around his limbs. He managed to wrestle himself free and sat up, rubbing the growing bump on his head. "Fell off the bed."

Underscore hissed with sympathy. *"You okay? No concussion?"*

"Yeah." Tommy got to his feet, squinting at the clock hanging beside the window. "Fuck, it's like two in the morning. Sorry for waking you."

"It's fine," all three voices said in unison. *"Go back to sleep,"* Ran added. *"You better not be thinking of mining at this hour."*

"Fuck no." Tommy flopped onto the bed, shaking out the blanket and wrapping it around himself. "I'm going back to sleep. Wake me if the house burns down."

Ran snickered and fell silent. Purpled let out a flash of mild amusement before he, too, settled down. They laid there in peaceful silence, eyes drifting shut. Tommy had just started to doze off when--

"Wanna see something cool?"

Tommy groaned, opening his eyes to glare at the ceiling. "Underscore, c'mon, I was about to fall asleep."

"You weren't," Underscore chirped. *"And I've been waiting to show you this, you can spare a few minutes."*

"Oh no," Ran muttered, amusement buzzing across their mindscape. Underscore gave the distinct impression of a pout-- and vanished.

The three of them froze.

"T-Tubbo?" Ran called. Panic crackled through their chest and Tommy jerked up, lungs heaving. *"Tubbo!"*

Underscore popped back into existence like he'd never been gone. *"Cool, isn't it?"*

Tommy pressed a fist to his chest, trying to slow his pounding heart. "Fucking *End*, Tubbo, you scared the shit out of us!"

*"So you know how we kinda-- go forward when we're in control, right, and slide back when we're not? So I tried going **further** back while you all were asleep--"*

*"You **what** ?"*

"--and I figured we could-- drift. Hide in the back. I can't see things or feel you guys when I'm back there - I think it stops the whole emotions thing!"

"That was dangerous," Purpled cut in. "You didn't know what was back there."

Underscore gasped. *"Are you implying that Tommy's mind is a--"*

"That's not what I meant."

*"We don't know how this works," Ran whispered. His wall wasn't strong enough to stop his anxiety from seeping through the cracks. "What if you got stuck? What if-- what if you never came back and we just-- **woke up** and you were gone?"*

". . . Oh."

Agitation buzzed beneath his ribs. Tommy grimaced, curling into a ball.

"I didn't know I--" Underscore shifted, guilt flaring. *"I'm sorry. I didn't think."*

"You didn't," Purpled agreed.

"Okay, okay, new rule," Tommy croaked. He rubbed a hand across his chest, trying to dissipate the lingering ache. "Let's tell each other shit before we start experimenting, yeah? We're all sharing headspace here, we gotta talk before we do something that's gonna impact all of us."

"Okay."

"Yes."

"Sorry," Underscore said again.

Tommy ran a hand down his face, exhaustion washing over him as his taut nerves relaxed. "It's. . . Tell us next time, yeah?"

"And warn everyone before you, uh, fall back," Purpled said. *"That goes for all of us."*

*"You were **gone**,"* Ran said. *"You just disappeared."*

Underscore shrunk into himself, presence wavering before he pressed forward. Ran leaned into him, almost like he was trying to reassure himself. Tommy bit the inside of his cheek and stared at the wall.

When Ran finally managed to tamp down on his anxiety, the hour hand of the clock had slid past three. Tommy sat up, pulling his knees to his chest.

". . . Now what?" he asked aloud.

"Go back to sleep," Purpled said. *"Dream's visiting tomorrow. You need to rest."*

At the mention of Dream, Tommy's heart jumped. He shook his head. "I don't think I can fall asleep."

Ran spoke up, voice hoarse despite the fact that he didn't have a physical throat. "*Try. We can. . . we can talk more about what happened later.*"

Tommy didn't protest, lying back down. He proceeded to toss and turn for the rest of the night.

the demons in my mind

Chapter Summary

Trauma, guilt, and the start of the healing process.

Chapter Notes

In case it wasn't clear, all mentioned "love" in this fic is platonic and if you want to take it romantically, please stop reading this fic.

TW: Graphic Violence, Body Horror, Torture (skip the italicized dream sequences if those trigger you). Mentioned MCD.

"Why don't you just kick Dream into the hole?"

Tommy slammed a hand over his mouth to stop a surprised laugh from spilling out, staring wide-eyed at Dream's back. The man in question was currently focused on the pit he was digging.

Ran drew back, appalled. *"Underscore!"*

"No, no, he has a point." Purpled radiated stilted amusement, like he found the idea funny but was seriously considering it. *"Just wait until he lights the TNT, then push him in."*

Tommy dearly wanted to reply, but he couldn't talk-- not when Dream could hear. He settled for violently shaking his head.

"Guys." Ran sounded exasperated. *"He's wearing full netherite."*

"Your point?"

At that moment, Dream turned around and gestured towards the hole. The voices fell silent as Tommy cleared out his inventory, courteously restraining their emotions as much as they could.

Dream lit the TNT with a click of flint and steel, then nudged the block into the hole.

“Push him in, push him in,” Underscore chanted. Tommy felt a flash of begrudging amusement.

And then his hands twitched.

A flash of panic sliced through them. Underscore instantly retreated, glee giving way to a mix of horror and guilt. *“Oh shit, I didn’t mean to-- Tommy, I’m so sorry!”*

Tommy didn’t reply, just took two large steps back as the TNT exploded, clutching his wrists and digging his nails into his skin until he drew blood. He focused on his breathing. Breathe in, breathe out.

“In, two, three, four,” Purpled instructed. *“Hold, two, three, four, five, six, seven. Out, two, three, four--”*

“You’ve been awfully quiet.”

Tommy jerked, nails scraping across his skin. Their carefully constructed calm shattered like glass.

Dream tilted his head. Tommy realized belatedly that he was waiting for an answer. “Oh,” he said. “Um. Yeah. Sorry. Lot on my mind, lately.”

“Anything in particular?”

“Just-- I’m just a bit tired, yeah.” Tommy scuffed the ground with his tattered sneaker.

“Sleeping doesn’t really help.”

“I’m sorry.” And Dream *did* sound genuinely sorry. “Hope you’ll feel better soon. Maybe you should spend more time outside, in the sun. Focus less on mining.”

“Maybe,” Tommy said, and *did not* think about the hours of now-useless mining he’d done.

“Are you. . . mad at me?”

“No,” Tommy said. He swept the brush across Mushroom Henry’s side.

Underscore poked at his walls. Tommy mentally slapped his ‘fingers’ away.

“I’m not mad,” he said. “I’m not.”

*“Well you’re not **happy** either,”* Purpled deadpanned.

“Tommy, I overstepped--”

“I said I’m not mad,” Tommy interrupted again. He dragged the bristles across the velveteen skin a bit harsher than necessary, earning a displeased moo from Mushroom Henry. “Sorry, Henry.”

“Let me apologize,” Underscore insisted. “I overstepped your boundaries.”

Tommy’s mouth was awfully dry. He swallowed. “You didn’t mean to, yeah? That’s all that matters.”

Frustration and guilt flashed in their chest. *“It does matter! You matter, Tommy. What I did was wrong and you shouldn’t just brush it off!”*

Tommy paused his brushing long enough to make an incredulous face. Not that any of the voices could see it. “Tub-- Underscore, do you *want* me to get mad at you?”

“I think, um,” Ran cut in, *“that, um, he means that you should, um, value yourself? A bit more?”*

“I do value myself. I’m just not mad.”

They settled into an uneasy silence. Tommy caught snippets of *something* from Underscore, but they flashed by too fast for him to interpret. He returned to brushing Mushroom Henry, trying to ignore the faint echoes of disapproval from the other three. Unbidden, his thoughts cycled through a carousel, circling back and forth but always returning to one question. A question that had burned on his tongue since the day he’d been exiled.

Tommy paused, turning the brush over his hands. “. . .Do you hate me?”

“What?” Three voices asked in unison.

Tommy blanched. “Shit, I didn’t mean to say that.”

“Hate you?” Ran projected a swirl of *confusion-worry-sadness*. *“Why would we hate you?”*

“Not-- not you, not all of you,” Tommy blurted. He really needed to stop talking, but his panic had loosened his tongue and *now he couldn’t stop*. “Just, uh, just Tub-- Underscore.”

Surprise, sharp and bright, streaked through them. *“No!”* Underscore cried. *“No, Tommy, **no**, why would you think that?!”*

“You exiled me.”

Something heavy settled behind Tommy’s ribs. *“Oh,”* Ran whispered, before he fell back. Purpled followed, leaving Tommy and Underscore alone at the front.

“Tommy. . .” Underscore trailed off, eddies of anguish and self-hatred rippling through their shared mindscape. *“I don’t hate you.”*

Tommy dug his fingernails into the handle of the brush. Underscore wasn’t *his* Tubbo. He didn’t need to hurt him like this, he had to *stop talking*, but-- ever since the fiasco started, the

question had been hovering in the back of his mind, growing heavier and heavier until the dam broke. He couldn't hold it back anymore.

“Then *why?*” he choked out. “Why did you-- why did you let Dream do this?”

“I didn't know it was this bad,” Underscore started, only to hiss. *“No, that's not an excuse. I'm sorry, Tommy. I didn't-- I shouldn't have--”*

“But you *did!*” Tommy shouted. Mushroom Henry startled. Guilt curled in Tommy's chest, but he couldn't stop talking. The words that had been boiling in the back of his throat for *months* spilled over. “Dammit Tubbo, I don't want an apology, I just want to know *why!*”

Underscore fell silent. His emotional turmoil shrank until Tommy could barely feel it, hidden behind an iron wall of self-control.

“You're right,” he said at last. *“You. . . you deserve an explanation.”*

He paused for a moment, then took an unnecessary breath.

“Dream. . . he gave me an ultimatum. Either I exile you, or he'd destroy L'Manberg. I. . . I chose L'Manberg.”

Tommy slammed his walls down, trying to contain the sudden barrage of emotion. Some must have slipped through the cracks, because Underscore sped up, his words rushing into one another.

*“Dream was threatening us, and I panicked. It doesn't excuse what I did. **Nothing** can excuse what I did. I broke our promise, Tommy, and I'm-- I'm **so, so** sorry. I should have stuck to the plan--”*

“But you didn't.”

“. . . But I didn't.”

A soft, broken laugh bubbled from Tommy's throat. Underscore shifted uneasily as it grew louder, until Tommy was doubled over, fingers curled in his hair.

This was what it came down to, wasn't it? Him or L'Manberg, and everyone chose L'Manberg.

“Tommy. . .?”

Tommy's jaw snapped shut with a clack, cutting off his next cackle. “You chose L'Manberg,” he rasped. “Fuck, Tubbo. You chose L'Manberg over me.” He dragged his hands through his hair, tugging until his scalp stung. “*Fuck.*”

“Tomm--”

“You know what the worst thing is?” A guttural half-laugh tore loose from his chest. “I wanted to be mad. I wanted to hate you. But I *can't*. ”

"You have every right to be mad at me," Underscore said. "I'm mad at me. What I did--"

"No, no, Tubbo-- you don't-- you don't get it, you don't get it!" Tommy curled his fingers in his hair and *yanked*. A grin spread across his face, wide and bright and *splintered*, teeth clenched around shattered friendships and broken promises. *"I can't be mad! I can't, because I did the same fucking thing!"*

Because he had. He'd chosen L'Manberg when he gave up his discs and his second canon life. At the time, it seemed like the right thing to do. At the time, he'd still believed in Wilbur's dream.

When Tubbo exiled him, he didn't believe in Wilbur's dream. Wilbur was long dead and gone, and both of them had moved on. No, Tubbo had been thinking about *Tommy's* dream, about his own dream, their vision of New L'Manberg. Looking at his best friend and the nation they had fought and bled and died for together, he'd known that if he chose Tommy, L'Manberg would fall - and with it, the dream they'd sacrificed everything for. But if Tommy was exiled, nothing would change. L'Manberg would be safe. Dream would be satisfied. As Tubbo, it was the ultimate betrayal, but as the president, he had a responsibility to his people. So he'd chosen, telling himself that it was for the greater good.

He'd been wrong.

Now Tommy was alone, at Dream's mercy as he chipped away everything that made Tommy *Tommy*. According to the little information the voices had shared, L'Manberg was still going to fall. Everything they'd been through had been for *nothing*.

*"I'm sorry," Underscore repeated. They were useless words, and they both knew it. "I don't. . . Tommy, I know I haven't given you any reason to trust me, but **please**, give me-- give Tubbo another chance. I-- spent **years** trying to make up for it, and I know it's not enough, it's never going to be enough, but--"* his voice broke off into a wretched keen.

Tommy's sat down hard on the grass, the brush tumbling from his hand and rolling to a stop two feet away. Mushroom Henry nudged him, mooing in concern, then settled down at his side. Tommy leaned into her, trying to ground himself. His eyes were burning. He took a deep breath. He couldn't cry. Not here. Not now.

"I-- I need to think," he whispered. "I-- Tubbo, I'm not mad, but I-- I can't. I don't-- don't know how to feel."

Underscore wasn't crying, not in any way that was audible, but the waves of *sorrow-regret-grief* that rolled over them said enough. *"That's okay,"* he whispered. *"I understand. It's. . ."*

He fell into silence. Tommy didn't say anything.

"I'll leave you alone."

He faded into the back, still present but barely aware. Alone at the front, Tommy took a shuddering breath and let the tears fall.

Tommy turned over, passing an arm over his swollen eyes for the third time that hour. His mind was a mess of *hurt-anger-regret*, needling at him every time he tried to slip into dreams. The other three voices were already asleep, albeit fitfully. Tubbo-- *Underscore* was still sending out that *despair-hate-guilt* in fitful bursts, and it was fucking with Tommy's emotions.

He gritted his teeth and did his best to block them out, tugging his blanket a bit tighter. Logstedshire was a *huge* improvement from tntret, but the ocean breeze still slipped through the cracks in the walls. Fuck, he wished he could leave. Go somewhere nice and warm, with enough food to keep him full, and real physical people to talk to and-- and--

"I want to leave," he said aloud.

Ran stirred in his mind, breaking from his light doze. "*Hmm? Leave?*"

"Leave," he repeated. He traced the cracks in the ceiling with his eyes, imagining the stars. "I want to leave Logstedshire. Go somewhere else. Somewhere safe."

Ran's drowsiness evaporated. His sudden alertness prodded at the other voices, and Underscore shifted, a nonsensical stream of thoughts flitting through their shared mindspace. Ran and Tommy went quiet until he settled down, sinking back into unconsciousness.

"*Why don't you leave, then?*"

"I can't," Tommy muttered. "Not with-- not with Dream watching me."

"*Then leave when he's not here.*"

"And where would I go?"

Ran shifted like he wanted to say something, then thought better of it. Tommy chuckled, the sound devoid of humor.

"Exactly."

"*Go to sleep,*" Ran murmured. "*We'll keep you safe.*"

Both Tommy and Ran knew that the voices couldn't do much of anything, given the state they were in now. It was a lie, but a very nice one. Tommy closed his eyes and let himself believe it for just one night.

He drifted off to the sound of Ran's humming.

“So,” Tommy said, squinting at the sun through salt-crusted eyelids. “I’ve been. . . thinking.”

This was where Underscore would normally step in with a joke. Tommy found himself pausing, leaving space for him. Underscore remained silent. Tommy cleared his throat and pushed through the awkward pause.

“And uh, I realized that, I should probably-- I’ve been meaning to show you guys something.”

Curiosity-worry-fear bloomed across their mindscape. “*A good thing?*” Ran asked.

Tommy crouched down next to the outer wall and dug his shovel into the dirt. “Depends.”

Three blocks down, his shovel hit air. He slid into the tunnel, squirming his way through the narrow gap and dropping down into a room beneath the house. The walls were lined with chests, barely visible in the dim light bleeding in from the tunnel.

“*What is this?*”

Tommy pried open one of the chests to reveal a stack of iron. “When I first got here, I made a-- vault of sorts, to store things so Dream wouldn’t make me blow them up. I put things in it for a while, but. . .”

“*But. . .?*”

Tommy shut the chest, waving away the puff of dust it created. “Realized that I didn’t really know what I wanted to do with it. I think I originally wanted to kill Dream, but he’s, uh, I can’t beat him. Not that I want to,” he added hastily. “He’s my friend now. I think.”

All three voices projected sharp *disapproval*. Tommy hurried onwards before they could speak.

“But yeah! I dunno, I never got around to destroying it because I was-- scared, I guess. I just thought, since you guys are here too now-- maybe you’d find some use for all this.” He waved a hand at the chests. “Maybe renovating the UFO or something.”

“*What do you have in here?*” Underscore asked. He spoke slowly, like he expected to be cut off any second. Tommy ignored the oddity, firmly determined to use his usual *ignore-it-until-it-stops-hurting* strategy.

“Uh, diamonds. Iron. Lapis. Mostly stuff I grabbed from mining, I can use it to enchant or build shit.”

“*We should move it,*” Ran said. “*Dream. . . he digs holes in Logstedshire a lot. If he found this place. . .*”

Tommy swallowed, his heart turning in his chest. He hadn’t realized how easily he could get caught. “Where. . . where, then? He digs up and down the beach too, and I can’t hide it in the

forest. I'd forget where it is."

"The UFO," Purpled said. "Put it under the UFO. Easy access to materials, and Dream never digs there."

"Good. That's, uh, that's a great idea."

Tommy agreed, but. . . "Moving this is gonna be a pain."

"Put it in the ender chest Eret gave you," Ran suggested. "Then move the empty chest and replace the stuff in it."

"Still a pain," Tommy grumbled, but he pulled out his ender chest and began piling things in.

This project would take quite a while, but at least the voices were there to cheer him on.

Tommy folded his hands around the mug and took a deep breath. The scent of chocolate filled his nose, and he let himself sit there for a moment, steeling his nerves. When he was confident that he wouldn't burst into tears, he raised his head to look at the person sitting at the other end of the table. "Tommy."

"Tubbo," the other Tommy returned. He folded his arms across his chest and met him with an unreadable stare.

Tommy took a deep breath. ". . . About Exile."

Other Tommy shrugged. "I forgive you."

Tommy stilled. He hadn't been expecting that. "I-- what?"

"I forgive you," Other Tommy said. His gaze skittered off to the side, tracing the patterned wood of the table. "It's in the past. There's no use holding onto that shit."

Tommy's hands spasmed around the mug. He forced himself to let go of it before he splashed hot chocolate everywhere. "Tommy, that doesn't mean it didn't happen."

Other Tommy scoffed. "Well yeah, I know that. I just don't care anymore."

Tommy licked his lips, trying to figure out what to say. ". . . I still wronged you. You deserve-- you deserve an apology, Tommy."

"Yeah, well, wouldn't change much, would it? You did things you regretted, I did things I regretted. Doesn't matter much when the world is ending."

Silence descended upon the kitchen. Tommy picked his mug up and raised it to his lips. The drink had gone lukewarm already, and he grimaced as he took a sip. He set the cup down and sighed.

"I just. . . I still want to apologize, Tommy. It's. . . after everything, it's the least I could do."

*"Mm." Other Tommy's chair squeaked as he shifted. "Sure, go ahead. Apologize if it makes you feel better, it doesn't matter. **You still left me behind.**"*

Tommy's head snapped up. Other Tommy smiled, his eyes empty and lifeless. Red flora bloomed across his cheek, crawling up towards the blood dripping from his hairline.

"Why'd you leave me behind, Tubbo?" he asked. "Why'd you let them take me?"

"I-- I didn't," Tommy breathed. "I tried, Tommy, I tried so hard to stop them--"

Other Tommy rolled his eyes. He didn't react as crimson vines wriggled between the floor tiles and dug their thorns into his flesh. "Well, you didn't try hard enough."

Tommy watched with horrified fascination as the other's arm came away with the sound of tearing muscle and shattering bone. He wanted to lunge forward, to swing at the vines, but he couldn't move.

So he sat there, hands clamped around his mug, as blood splattered across his clothes and his best friend was torn apart. He sat there as the vines smashed through the kitchen table to reveal a gaping maw in the floor, where Tommy's remains were to be devoured by the Crimson. He sat there as the door swung open and two men stepped inside, scarlet threads wriggling beneath their skin.

He tried, then, to shut his eyes. But his eyelids were frozen, just like the rest of him, so he could only watch as Dream and Technoblade approached, their hands coming up to drag him forward towards the mass of vines waiting on the floor. The vermillion flora parted to reveal the remains of a mangled face, one blue eye staring balefully down at him. Tommy wanted to throw up.

A clawed hand shoved him forward, and he fell into the Crimson's embrace.

Tommy shot up, screaming. A moment later, his vision went black as his mental walls shattered under a tsunami of guilt-rage-grief.

When he came to, he was kneeling by his bed, heaving up the remains of his meager dinner. His head was a mess of white noise and fury, but gradually, voices filtered back in.

"--nightmare," Underscore was saying. "I think my emotions were affecting him."

"What the fuck," Tommy croaked.

Relief bloomed in their chest. "Tommy," Ran greeted. "Are you okay?"

“What the *fuck*, ” Tommy repeated. He clapped a hand over his shoulder, rubbing his arm to reassure himself that it was still there. “I-- what the fuck was-- that?”

“*What?* ”

“I just got torn apart by-- by a fucking rosebush!”

Cold horror seeped into their lungs. “*You saw that?*” Underscore breathed.

“Yeah, I just-- watched myself get--” Tommy sat back on his heels and dragged his hands down his face. “What the *fuck*. ”

“*Well,* ” Purpled said. “*That’s not good.* ”

Ran’s anxiety gnawed at their ribs. “*You can see our dreams?* ”

Tommy grimaced. “I-- yeah. Yeah. Not as myself-- I was-- I was *Tubbo*, I think, in this one.”

“*Have you seen any other dreams?*” Underscore demanded. Tommy’s wince was answer enough. “*What were they? What did you see?* ”

“I don’t-- I only remember one,” Tommy admitted. “Uh. . . Ran’s cat was sitting on my chair, or something--”

“*Mine,* ” Purpled said. “*That one’s. . . that’s mine.* ”

“*Right. Okay.* ” Ran seemed to shake himself. “*So you can see all of our dreams. That’s. . . not ideal.* ”

Underscore hummed. “*We could try blocking them? Like we did with emotions?* ”

“*How?* ”

Silence descended. Tommy took a deep breath, closing his eyes, only to flinch when an imprint of his mutilated face flashed behind his eyelids. “Is that what happened?” he blurted. “To-- to me?”

An unnameable emotion spiked from Underscore’s direction before he clamped down on it. “*Not quite.* ”

“. . . So your brain just invented me getting torn apart?” Tommy let out a humorless laugh. “That’s pretty fucked up, Tubs.”

“*Underscore,* ” Underscore corrected sharply, then drew in on himself. “*And no, that’s not-- it’s not-- sorry, I. . . I can’t.* ”

“Then *what?* ” Tommy demanded. He would normally be kinder than this, but the days of waiting had worn his patience thin. The nightmare was the last straw. “Why can’t you just tell me?”

“I--”

“Underscore saw you die,” Purpled cut in. “The two of you were out to look for supplies. Dream and Technoblade caught you and dragged you to the Egg. Underscore watched you get eaten alive. He only escaped because you gave him your last ender pearl.”

“*Purpled!*” Underscore shrieked.

“He asked.”

Tommy, meanwhile, had gone bone-white. He slammed a hand against the floor to ground himself and took deep breaths, trying to recall his breathing exercises through the terror clouding his mind. “Well *shit*,” he wheezed. “That’s-- that’s fucked up.”

“Just a little, yes,” Purpled said dryly.

“So I-- played the fucking self-sacrifice card?” Tommy tugged at his hair. “What the fuck?”

But even as he spoke, he understood. Their relationship wasn’t the best right now, but between himself and Tubbo, Tommy would choose Tubbo in an instant.

(It was a shame that Tubbo hadn’t done the same-- **no, he couldn’t think like that.**)

“I know it’s not--” Underscore started, but Tommy interrupted him.

“No, shut up, shut up. He did it, and I get why he did it. I’m just--” he recalled the dream--
“fuck, this is so messed up.”

“It is,” Ran agreed.

Purpled shoved Underscore’s guilt aside with a burst of cold determination. *“Which is why we’re trying to change it. Your death was the beginning of-- well, not the end, more the **end** of the end. You’re the only person on this server that’s truly immune to the Egg. We need you.”*

Tommy couldn’t help the pang of hurt that shot through him. His walls were unfortunately still down, so the other three voices caught it. “*Tommy?*” Ran sounded alarmed. *“What’s wrong?”*

Tommy grimaced. “You. . . so you want to save me because the world would end if I died?”

“Prime, no!” Underscore blurted. *“I mean-- yeah, we don’t want the world to end, but we’re here because we care about you, Tommy.”*

“Underscore’s right,” Purpled said. *“And even if we didn’t mess the travel up and ended up in our old bodies like we were **supposed** to, we’d still rescue you from exile.”*

“You’re our friend,” Ran added firmly.

“You mean future Tommy was your friend,” Tommy muttered. “Not me.”

“Stop being stupid,” Underscore snapped, and Tommy jerked because this was the first time he’d heard him sound so angry at him. “You’re Tommy, right?”

“Well yeah, bu--”

“No. That’s all that matters. You’re Tommy, no matter what year we’re in.”

Tommy swallowed. “You. . . really mean that?”

Underscore’s indignance softened. *“Tommy, listen. You’re my best friend, my brother in all but blood. I don’t care if we’re in another timeline or alternate universe or whatever. I love you. I’ve loved you, and I will always love you. I’m sorry that I ever made you doubt that, and I’m sorry for the mistakes I made in the past, but I’m never going to do it again. I’ll stand by your side this time. Us against the world.”*

“You’re gonna make me cry,” Tommy joked, but the crack in his voice was very real. “I-- fuck, Tubbo-- Underscore, I don’t--”

Underscore prodded lightly at his consciousness. Tommy stepped aside, letting him take control of their arms. They rose up to wrap Tommy in a hug.

“Clingy,” Tommy whispered.

“Mm. I could say the same for you.”

“Bitch.”

“Bastard.”

“I hate you.”

“Love you too, Tommy.”

They sat there in silence for a little while, skin prickling as the ocean breeze raised goosebumps along their arms. Just as the first rays of sunlight began to peek through the window, Tommy spoke again.

“Underscore?”

“Yeah?”

“. . . I forgive you.”

Those three simple words held a weight that had been previously absent. Underscore let out a deep, shaking, breath.

“Thank you,” he whispered. “Thank you. I won’t make you regret this.”

Tommy’s eyes burned. “You won’t,” he agreed, then took back control of their arms so he could cover his face. “Fuck, ‘Score, I’m gonna cry.”

“It’s okay to cry.”

“Big men don’t cry.”

“Sometimes, they do.”

Tommy glared up at the ceiling and blinked until the burning faded. “Shut up,” he grumbled. Underscore sent a burst of *love-relief-laughter* in reply.

Ran slid into half-awareness from where he’d been lurking in the back. “*Everything good?*” he called.

“All good,” Underscore called back, sounding a bit choked up.

Tommy got to his feet as Ran rejoined them up front, Purpled trailing after him. He stretched, feeling his back crack, then heaved a sigh. “Well, boys, after *that* emotionally draining conversation, I am *famished*. How does food sound?”

He received three enthusiastic replies.

Tommy did end up sobbing into his toast halfway through breakfast, but the tears were all happy. For the first time since he’d been exiled, he felt hope.

It was a nice feeling. Tommy just prayed that it wouldn’t be squashed.

Tommy shoved the last chest into place with a grunt, then stepped back and scanned the vault. “How’s it look?”

“Like you need a better organization system.”

“Oh fuck you, purple bitch. I’ll organize my chests how you want. Not like you know how to do it better.”

“Actually--”

“Exactly. My point is made. Discussion closed.”

Purpled sent a very strong impression of an eye roll. Tommy smirked, sweeping his gaze around the completed room once more, then spun on his heel and headed towards the ladder.

“Food,” Ran blurted, seemingly out of nowhere. Tommy paused midstep, brow furrowing.

“... Food?” he echoed.

“Food. We should. Um. Store some food in the vault. Or grow some.” Ran shifted. *“You’re dependent on Dream for food. It’s not. . . the best.”*

“That’s a good point,” Purpled muttered when Tommy opened his mouth to protest. *“If he visits a couple days too late, or ‘forgets’ to bring food like he did last time. . .”*

“I can ration,” Tommy argued, pulling up his inventory to check how much food he had left. If he ate the bare minimum, he could probably get through another three days. “I’ll just make it last--”

“You don’t know when he’ll be back.”

“I can’t betray Dream--”

“You already have the vault. What’s a little more disobedience?”

Tommy silently cursed Purpled and his logic. “That’s. . .”

“Why are you so stubborn about this?” Underscore asked. *“It’s not going to hurt you.”*

“But Dr--”

“Fuck Dream. He can die in a hole.”

Surprised laughter burst from Tommy’s mouth, and he choked it down before he remembered that Dream wasn’t here to get mad at him. “Under-- Underscore, what the *fuck*.”

“Just saying,” Underscore muttered, and although his tone was lighthearted, there was something simmering underneath. *“He’s a right bastard if I’ve ever seen one and he deserves to die.”*

“Seconded,” Purpled deadpanned with no hesitation whatsoever.

Ranboo cut in before Tommy could protest. *“Point is, you need your own food supply. I, um, know how to make an underground farm, so if you want help. . . we could build one next to the chests.”*

Tommy’s mouth was dry. “I. . . are you *sure* it’s a good idea?”

“Yes,” all three voices answered. Tommy nodded.

“Right. Okay. I. . . I guess I can. Where. . . where do I start?”

Ran took an unnecessary breath. *“Well, we’re going to need some glowstone. . .”*

“What do you want from me?”

The man laughed, dark and twisted with hatred. “You know what I want.”

*“You took everything from me,” Tommy snapped. “You destroyed my base, you **used** me. You brought this on yourse--”*

The punch left stars in his vision. Tommy spat blood on the floor.

*“Don’t you **dare** say that,” the man snarled. “You killed him! You murdered him in cold blood--”*

“Like you wouldn’t have done the same to me!”

The man growled, his hands curled into fists. Tommy braced himself for the next blow.

It never came. The other took a step back, fury melting into eerie calm. “Well, it doesn’t matter now.”

Tommy rolled his eyes. “What, you’re finally gonna kill me?”

“No. I don’t want you to die.” The man hummed. A knife appeared in his hands. Tommy swallowed, eyeing the serrated edge and needle-sharp point.

“Mind letting me go then?” His snark didn’t cover the tremble in his voice, so he tugged at his manacles, letting the chains jingle. “I don’t think this place got the best reviews on Vrbo.”

*“I don’t want you to die,” the man repeated. He ran a finger across the back of the blade, caressing it. When he looked up, his eyes glinted with madness. “No, I want you to **suffer**.”*

Tommy gritted his teeth. His heart pounded in his ears. “Hey man, I don’t think this is the best idea--”

*“Suffer like you made him suffer,” the man hummed, stalking forward. He grabbed Tommy’s chin and jerked it up, pressing the tip of the knife under his left eye. “Suffer like you made **me** suffer.”*

The knife slid upwards. Tommy screamed.

Tommy jerked awake, lashing out and hitting nothing but air. He flailed, tangling his limbs in his blanket, and ended up crashing onto the floor.

A mantra of hide-hide-hide rang in his skull. He dove for the corner, shoving himself under the bed and curling into a ball.

He wasn’t sure how long he laid there, practically hyperventilating as Ran and Underscore struggled to reorient themselves.

“Wh--Tommy?” Underscore was the first to realize what was happening. “It’s okay, Tommy. You’re safe. You’re alone, in Logstedshire. You’ve got us.”

Tommy just shuddered, eyes pinned to the sliver of wall he could see from beneath the bed. He didn't know why, but he kept expecting a hand to appear, to wrap around his wrist or ~~remaining~~ ankle and drag him out from under the bed, where--

don't think don't think don't

-- where *something* would happen to him. He wasn't sure what, all he knew was that he had to *hide*, to delay the inevitable, because he didn't--

"Oh," Underscore said, just as Ran shuddered with horrified realization. "*Purpled! Purpled, wake up!*"

"*Purpled!*" Ran joined in as the *terror-rage-hate* spiked. "*It's us! Und-- Tubbo and Ranboo! We're in the past, remember? You're not there anymore!*"

Tommy tried to force a question past his clenched teeth, but the *thought* of making any noise set his heart racing. He was forced to lie there, useless, as his friends tried to wake Purpled.

The terror spiked, and Tommy physically *jerked* as Purpled slammed into control. Half-awake, the voice clamped a hand over his mouth, wild gaze snapping towards the open air at the edges of the bed.

"*Purpled! What the fuck!*"

Purpled's head shot up, meeting the bedframe with a crash. "Tommy. . .?" he whispered.

Tommy projected a flurry of *calm-safe-relief*. "*Yup. Big man TommyInnit here.*"

"But that's. . ." Purpled paused, then slowly slid his left eye open. He blinked a few times and looked down at his hands. ". . . Oh."

Without warning, he slid out of control, leaving their body to collapse bonelessly against the ground. Tommy caught it before their face could meet the floorboards. He winced, reaching up to nurse the new bump on his head, then turned his attention inwards.

"Hey man, you okay?"

Purpled's iron wall remained as blank and impervious as the face of a cliff.

Tommy pressed his knees closer to his chest, ignoring how the rough wooden floor scraped at his bare arms. "Do you. . . wanna talk about it?"

"No."

"Okay." Tommy took a deep breath. "Will you be okay if I get out from under the bed?"

"*Do whatever,*" Purpled said. "*I'm falling back.*"

He vanished from the mindscape.

“Ran. Underscore. Stop.”

Both voices turned from where they’d been trying to reach Purpled, indignant and worried in turn. “*We can’t just--*” Underscore started, but Tommy cut him off.

“It’s been two days, ‘Score. He’s not ready to talk yet.”

“*What else are we supposed to do?*”

“Wait for him. He’ll be back eventually.”

Neither of the voices liked this very much, if their *worry-frustration-sorrow* was any indication. Tommy sighed.

“And *while* we’re waiting, we can make a welcome back gift, yeah?” He gestured to the chests arrayed around him. “I’ve already got us some sand and gravel.”

“*You want to make another UFO for him,*” Ran realized.

“Not. . . exactly. I’m gonna collect the materials, but he can build it himself.”

Underscore hummed. “*That’s a good idea. Building’s a good distraction for him - when he first came to our base, he’d spend hours locked up in his room with his redstone. Tommy had to drag him out so he would eat. Not exactly the healthiest coping mechanism, but as long as we’re here to remind him to take breaks, he’ll be fine.*”

“*So what exactly do you need help with?*” Ran asked. “*Tub-- Underscore and I aren’t the best with builds, so. . .*”

“Nah, I just need help collecting materials. Taking turns, y’know? ‘S a good way to get used to, uh, moving.”

Both voices exchanged a flurry of thoughts and emotions. “*If you’re. . . okay with it,*” Ran said hesitantly. Tommy rolled his eyes.

“Yes, for fuck’s sake, I’m *asking* you to do this.” He hefted his shovel and jerked his head towards the beach. “Now stop being a pussy and grab some more sand. We’re gonna need more concrete powder than this to build the thing.”

“Hey Purp. Purple. Purpled.” Tommy punctuated each name with a mental jab at the back of their mindscape. “Come on, I know you can feel me.”

Purpled slid forward just the slightest bit, enough that his voice was distant, but audible. *“What do you want?”*

“Come up here and help me with this, I’m shit with blueprints.”

Purpled paused for a moment, then slid forward a bit more. *“... Blueprints?”*

In answer, Tommy unrolled the rough sketch of the UFO they’d made a few months prior (and promptly ditched, because the entire UFO had been made of cobblestone, so the block placements hadn’t mattered). “I’m making a second one,” he said. A chest to his right sprang open with a flick of his wrist, revealing the materials inside. “Ran and ‘Score helped me gather shit. It’s all here.”

“Red stained glass,” Purpled murmured. *“Concrete. . . you’re going to make an actual UFO this time?”*

“Yup. And I need your help.”

Purpled hesitated. Tommy waited patiently as he deliberated.

“... We’ll need to change the blueprints,” he warned at last. *“The cobblestone one looked different enough that Dream didn’t ask any questions, but if he suspects that my younger self is visiting you. . .”*

“That’s fine!” Tommy balled up the current blueprints and tossed them away, ignoring Ran’s yelp of protest. He retrieved a fresh sheet of paper from a chest and a chunk of graphite. “More room for creativity an’ shit. What ideas do you have?”

“I know what you’re doing,” Purpled said.

Tommy grinned. “Is it working?”

“... Yes.”

Tommy waved the graphite in the air. “C’mon then. Get sketching.”

“You’re. . . not going to ask?”

“If you don’t want to talk about it, I won’t ask.”

“... Alright.” Purpled reached for the front, and Tommy relinquished control.

The next two hours were whittled away in a whirl of graphite and paper. Purpled sketched while the other three threw their own ideas into the mix. The resulting structure was less like a UFO and more like a triangular spaceship, with wings and a cockpit enclosed with red glass.

“I love it,” Tommy declared. “I’m gonna name it Red Riot.”

“. . . *That name sounds familiar,*” Ran muttered. Underscore snorted.

“Let’s build it before we start talking about names, yeah?”

“That sounds like a *great* idea.” Tommy marched over to the chests lined up against the wall, only to pause. “Wait, where are we going to build it again?”

Purpled snorted, the last tendrils of his unease dissipating into nothingness. “*You’re all idiots.*”

“Amazing idiots,” Underscore chirped. *“And you say that like you’re not an idiot yourself.”*

“We’re here for you,” Ran added. *“Like in the base, remember?”*

“And if you ever want a distraction--” Tommy jabbed his finger back towards the chests, “--I’m here. If you just want to be alone, though, *tell us*. Don’t just cut us off, that’s a dick move. We’ll respect your boundaries.”

“What is this, group therapy?” Purpled muttered, but the other three could feel his *gratitude-relief-fondness*. *“I’ll. . . yeah, I’ll do that next time. Sorry. And. . . thanks, I guess.”*

“S what friends are for,” Tommy replied. He cracked his neck, then pried the chest open. “Now with that out of the way-- let’s get to building shit!”

“No.”

“I, for one, think it’s a great idea--”

“Shut up.”

“It’s a perfect idea,” Tommy sniffed. “You don’t have any nightmares about cows, right? So I sleep next to cow, cow wakes me if I have nightmare, and because none of us have been traumatized by the most amazing animal in existence we don’t flip out or some shit.”

“You can’t put a cow in a house!”

“I mean, Henrietta--”

“Was kept in an underground cowpen. Doesn’t count as part of the ‘house’.”

“But it does count as part of the bunker as a whole--”

“Henrietta was Tommy’s. Did Tommy sleep in the cowpen? No, therefore your argument is invalid. You can’t bring Mushroom Henry into the house.”

“It’s my house, I get to decide,” Tommy sniped, and then added for good measure, “Bitch.”

Purpled let out a long, long sigh. *“Why am I the only voice of reason here?”*

“It wouldn’t hurt,” was Ran’s input. *“We might as well--”*

“You’re biased.”

“You are too!”

“And I’m the one with the final say.”

They ended up sleeping against Mushroom Henry’s side that night.

It was the best sleep they’d had in a while. Purpled refused to comment on the waves of smugness Tommy radiated for the rest of the day.

at the end of all things

Chapter Summary

It all comes crashing down.

Chapter Notes

TW: Manipulation, Physical and Psychological Abuse, Character Death, Suicide Attempt

Tommy rolled onto his side and groaned. The air in Logstedshire was swelteringly hot tonight, and he couldn't doze off. It didn't help that he was sharing body heat with Mushroom Henry. At this rate, he wasn't going to sleep at all.

"So," Underscore said. Tommy huffed and begrudgingly turned his attention towards him, feeling the other two do the same. *"Since none of us are falling asleep anytime soon, what would happen if we actually pushed Dream into the hole?"*

"Netherite armor," Ran replied instantly. *"The explosion won't kill him."*

"But it might knock him unconscious, or hurt him enough that he can't move--"

"Which I'm *not* doing," Tommy reminded them.

Underscore kept talking. *"--which would give us enough time to run."*

"He has three lives," Ran countered. *"He'd just come back and kill Tommy."*

"So? Just shove him in and run for it. He can't kill Tommy if he can't catch up. His spawn point might be thousands of blocks away."

Tommy butted in, rolling his eyes. "Okay, say I wanted to kill Dream. Where the fuck would I go afterwards?"

"Where you went last time! Ran knows where Technoblade lives, he can. . ."

Underscore trailed off with a flash of *realization*.

"Well," Purpled said. *"That's. . . an escape plan. We accidentally came up with an escape plan."*

Tommy sat up. “I’m *not* pushing Dream into a hole.”

“*Then at least-- think about running?*”

“To *Technoblade*? He hates me.”

“*He’d be willing to help you if you have mutual goals,*” Ran said. “*Trust me, you. . . he took you in last time.*”

“I’m not leaving. I’m not *allowed* to leave.”

Underscore snorted. “*Since when has that stopped you?*”

Tommy lay back down and scowled at the ceiling. “I’m not leaving,” he repeated, sending a flash of irritation in their direction. Unfortunately, his mind chose that moment to stray to thoughts of Dream *catching* him in the act of running, and he ended up shoving a bundle of irritation-tinged *fear* towards them instead. All three voices recoiled like they’d been burned.

“*Noted,*” Purpled muttered.

With a loud huff, Tommy laid back down and buried his face in Mushroom Henry’s side. The mooshroom snuffled in her sleep, shifting towards Tommy.

“*. . . We’ll talk about this tomorrow,*” Underscore said.

Tommy grunted in response. The voices retreated, leaving him to his own thoughts.

“*If you’ll just reconsider--*”

“No,” Tommy repeated for the fifth time that morning. He slammed the chest shut and clambered up the ladder, kicking the blocks concealing the entrance into place. “I’m not leaving.”

“*You said you wanted to,*” Ran reminded him. “*Two weeks ago.*”

“I was half-asleep at the time.”

“*Guys, leave it,*” Purpled cut in. “*He’s not going to change his mind.*”

“*But why?*” Underscore’s exasperation needled at Tommy like an unpleasant itch. “*Why don’t you want to leave?*”

“I have a *home* here, ‘Score.” Tommy swept his gaze over Logstedshire. “‘Sides, I can’t just up and leave Dream--”

“Forget Dream! He hasn’t done anything for you--”

“He gave me food!”

“He was the one who took away your food in the first place! And it doesn’t mean you owe him your life!”

“He’s my friend--”

“He’s a manipulative bastard.” Underscore heaved a sigh. *“Tommy, he got you exiled. You **know** this.”*

Tommy faltered, logic warring with emotion. “I-- he’s-- he’s my friend,” he repeated. Something dark and unpleasant scraped the inside of his throat. “I can tell. It’s a-- a feeling, you know?” When Underscore drew himself up to speak again, Tommy shook his head. “Drop it. I don’t want to talk about it.”

“You can’t avoid this conversation forever,” Underscore warned.

Tommy ignored him.

“So this is your newest project?”

“Yup!” Tommy cheered. “I’m gonna name it Red Riot.”

“Hm.” Dream tilted his head, examining the nearly-finished spacecraft in the sky. “You designed this? All by yourself?”

Tommy drew himself up, ignoring the muted panic Ran was doing his best to wrestle down. “I’ll have you know, I am an a-ma-zing arch-- archi-- builder. I make the coolest builds. The best. All the other men are jealous of my skills.”

“If you say so,” Dream agreed. He strolled over to the cobblestone UFO, which stood about twenty feet away from the Red Riot. “This one doesn’t get a name?”

“... POG 3000,” Tommy said.

For a moment, Purpled’s iron grip on his emotions slid aside to project a feeling of *great suffering*. Dream turned to stare at Tommy.

“You made that up on the spot, didn’t you?”

Tommy glowered at him. “No! It’s an amazing name that I put a lot of thought into.”

“Okay, child.”

“I’M NOT A FUCKIN’ CHILD!”

Dream just let out his wheezing laugh. Tommy let his complaints dissolve into incoherent grumbling.

When the last of Dream’s laughter had died into comfortable silence, he rocked back on his heels and stuck his hands in his pockets. “Well,” he hummed. “I have to go now, so. . .” he pulled out a shovel.

Tommy stiffened, ease melting into apprehension. “W-wait, Dream. You said last time that I. . . didn’t have to put my things in the hole this time. B-because I’ve been. Good.”

Dream tilted his head. “Hmm. I don’t think I said that.”

“B-but. . .”

Dream stared at him. Tommy folded like a stack of cards, turning away.

“Yeah. I. Sorry. I must have remembered wrong.”

“You did.” Dream tilted his head. It sounded like he was smiling. “It’s okay, Tommy. I forgive you.”

With that, he dug his shovel into the ground. Three bursts of alarm and terror went off like fireworks in his chest. Tommy jerked, sending a spasm of *worry-questioning-fear* at the voices.

“He’s digging too close to the UFO,” Underscore hissed. Cold horror trickled down Tommy’s spine. *“If he finds the vault--”*

“He won’t,” Ran said. It sounded less like a statement and more like a prayer. *“He **can’t**.”*

Tommy bit his tongue. *Please, please, please, please,* he begged. Bit by bit, the hole deepened. After what felt like an eternity, Dream straightened and turned to him.

“Items in the hole,” he said.

“Don’t relax yet,” Underscore warned. *“We don’t know if the explosion will expose the vault.”*

Tommy’s heart was pounding in his ears. “Yeah, yeah. Let me just--” he reached into his inventory, only to hesitate.

Currently, all he had were tools and a few miscellaneous blocks. But the thing that *really* made him pause was the stack of gray concrete sitting in the corner. That stack of concrete was the last part he needed to complete Red Riot.

“Don’t give up the concrete,” Purpled said. *“He won’t know.”*

The thought of disobeying Dream terrified him, but. . . he didn’t want to spend another two days grinding for gravel. Besides, he’d already disobeyed Dream by making a vault and a

farm. What was one more?

“Tommy?” Dream prompted. Tommy flinched and shook his head.

“Sorry, sorry, I . . . blacked out for a bit.” He forced out a laugh and began stripping his iron armor off.

Dream made a noise of concern. “Have you been drinking enough water?”

Tommy shrugged and kicked his cuisses into the pit. “Dunno. Haven’t been keeping track.”

“You should be more careful,” Dream admonished. He watched as Tommy emptied the rest of his inventory - sans the concrete, but Dream didn’t need to know that - into the hole. “Is that everything?”

“Mhm.” Tommy dug his fingernails into the palms of his hands, hiding them behind his back so Dream wouldn’t see that they were trembling. “Yeah, that’s. . . that’s all.”

Dream turned away with a flick of flint and steel. The TNT went off. The moment the ringing in his ears died down, Tommy lurched forwards, waving away the smoke so he could get a look at the crater.

It looked. . . like any other crater. There was nothing in it but dirt and ashes. They’d hidden the vault deep enough.

The rush of relief from Tommy and the three voices combined made their knees go weak. Tommy stumbled, nearly falling on his face. He righted himself before Dream could step forward. “Sorry, sorry,” he gasped. “Just a dizzy spell--”

Movement flashed in the corner of his eye. Tommy realized with a flare of horror that the explosion had taken a sizable chunk out of the UFO’s foundation. Now unbalanced, the UFO listed to the side, bearing down on Tommy and Dream with ten tons’ worth of force.

“*MOVE!*” Underscore screamed. Hands closed around Tommy’s arms, yanking him away just as the cobblestone structure came crashing down. Great plumes of dust rose in the air, stinging Tommy’s eyes. When it finally cleared, the area looked like a war zone. Tommy gaped at the destruction.

“Tommy?” Dream asked from behind him. “Are you okay? Are you hurt?”

Tommy shook himself. “Huh? I-- no, no, I’m fine. Th-thanks for the save, big man.”

Dream released him, and Tommy stepped away, rubbing at his arms. He stared at the shattered UFO, biting back the whine that rose in his throat. “. . . I gotta work on my structural integrity, eh?” he joked instead.

Dream hummed in reply, edging forward to peer at the ruined patch of land. Abruptly, his spine went rigid, hands curling into fists. Tommy flinched back.

He knew that stance. Dream was angry.

Dream stalked forward, blades of burnt grass crunching beneath his feet. He knelt at the edge of the crater. The weight of the UFO had broken through the thin ceiling that concealed Tommy's vault, laying it open for the world to see. Several chests had been crushed beneath the rubble, revealing their contents.

Most damning of all, however, was the now stone-strewn field of wheat carpeting the hollow beside the vault.

"*Oh no,*" Ran whispered.

Dream rose from his crouch and turned to Tommy. Somehow, his silence was worse than any shouting.

"Dr-Dream," Tommy began, taking a step forward. "I can-- I can explain--"

Dream pulled out a bundle of TNT and dropped it into the vault. Tommy threw himself back just in time to avoid the explosion. When the smoke cleared, he saw another flaming bundle sail upwards, rolling out of view behind Red Riot's rim. A moment later, the spacecraft went up in flames.

Purpled made a strangled noise and *fled*. Tommy reared back, too overcome with shock and horror to hide his reaction. Dream didn't even notice, instead turning on his heel and stalking back towards--

--back towards Logstedshire.

"Dream," Tommy begged, scrambling after him. "Dream, please, I know I was wrong, please don't--"

It was like he hadn't even heard him.

"*There's still time,*" Ran breathed. "*You can still save Mushroom Henry.*"

Tommy didn't hesitate. If there was any chance he could salvage *anything*, he'd take it. So he sprinted past Dream, who had methodically begun laying TNT across the ground, skidding to a stop in front of his cow. No time for explanations - he grabbed her lead and began tugging her away. Mushroom Henry, spooked by the explosions, resisted.

"Please, girl," Tommy begged. "Please come with me, I can't-- I can't lose you too--"

Purpled dragged himself back into awareness, his emotional turmoil locked behind plates of steel. "*Focus,*" he ordered. "*You're scaring her. Speak calmly.*"

Tommy took a deep breath. "Right, right. Mushroom Henry, we have to leave. Right now. It's--"

A chain of explosions cut him off. The world burst into flames, and Tommy screamed, throwing himself to the ground. Mushroom Henry fell to her knees beside him, pressing against him as the earth buckled around them.

The explosions went on for what felt like forever. Tommy remained curled into Mushroom Henry's side, shaking, until the deafening roar dulled to silence, leaving only the stench of smoke and gunpowder behind.

"*It's over,*" Underscore whispered.

Tommy rose on shaking legs, nearly stumbling over Mushroom Henry. The cow wobbled to her feet and steadied him, but Tommy could feel her sides heaving in quick, rapid breaths. He took a moment to just *breathe* with her, trying desperately to calm his racing heart.

The crunch of charred dirt beneath netherite boots shattered the silence. Tommy turned to see Dream stalking towards them. He stopped about a foot away and adjusted his white-knuckled grip on his pickaxe.

"Get out of my way."

Tommy's heart dropped into his stomach. "I-- no. No. Dream, don't--"

"I said," Dream snarled, "get *out* of my way."

"Please," Tommy begged, grabbing at his arms in a futile attempt to stop him. "Dream, *please--*"

Dream shoved him aside. With one smooth motion, he raised his pickaxe and brought it through Mushroom Henry's skull.

"NO!"

The scream tore itself from Tommy's throat, joined by three others. Tommy collapsed on his knees, cradling the mooshroom's head. Her glassy eyes stared back at him, accusing, as her lifeblood flowed between Tommy's fingers and stained his tattered clothes crimson.

"No, no, no," he gasped. "'No, Mushroom Henry--"

Dream tsked beside him, flicking blood and brain tissue off his blade. Tommy flinched as it splattered on his face. "Now look at what you made me do."

Tommy's vacant gaze turned towards him. "You killed her," he whispered.

Dream shook his head. "*You* killed it," he corrected. "This is your fault, Tommy. If you'd just obeyed me, it would still be alive."

Something in his head *snapped*. His vision flooded with violet.

"SHUT UP!" Ran howled, surging forward. Tommy was too dazed to stop him as he took control of their body, lunging forward with outstretched hands. Dream easily batted him aside, knocking him to the ground and grinding his head into the dirt with a boot. Ran snarled and spat, blood-drenched fingers scrabbling uselessly through the grass.

"Now now, Tommy, don't throw a temper tantrum--"

“I HATE YOU!” Ran screamed. ***“I HATE YOU I HATE YOU I HATE--”***

Dream drove the pommel of his axe into his back. Ran choked as pain *exploded* through his spine, leaving stars in his vision.

“Calm. Down,” Dream ordered. The sudden rush of terror from Tommy left Ran gagging on sobs, any fight disappearing in the blink of an eye. “You’re acting like a child. You *lied* to me! You need to be punished.”

Purpled wordlessly shoved Tommy away from the front. Tommy didn’t fight him.

“I’m going to kill him,” Underscore whispered. *“I’m going to **kill him.**”*

“Ranboo, you have to calm down,” Purpled called. The explosions were playing havoc with his more. . . unpleasant memories, but the others were feeling too strongly and someone had to keep a level head. So he put up an iron façade of calm and kicked his trauma into a corner to be dealt with later. *“The sooner Dream leaves, the sooner we can get Tommy out of here.”*

Ran could only reply with a wave of *hate-despair-fury*. The message was clear enough. Purpled grimaced and forcibly shoved his way into the front seat, mentally apologizing to Ran, who retreated into the back like his life depended on it (and thankfully took his ***rage-hate-grief*** with him).

It took every ounce of Purpled’s self-control not to flinch at the sudden pain that assaulted his senses. Instead he breathed, letting himself go limp. Ran had already been crying; all he had to do was encourage tears.

Dream hummed, slowly lifting his boot from their head. Purpled remained still, eyes open and blank, breath hitching in fake sobs. He didn’t react when Dream crouched down in front of him and tapped him on the cheek.

“Tommy,” he crooned, and Purpled stomped down Underscore’s urge to strangle the man. Or maybe it was his own. It was hard to tell. “Don’t ignore me. Come on, we weren’t finished.”

Purpled knew this game. The sooner he gave Dream what he wanted, the less Dream would hurt him. The sudden change in demeanor might be viewed as suspicious, but hopefully Dream would chalk it up to Tommy’s mental instability and the beatdown he’d been subjected to.

(Quackity thought he’d broken him, thought he’d shattered Purpled so thoroughly that he’d never fight again.

The moment he let his guard down, Purpled carved his face open with his own shears.)

Purpled let his eyes widen and his breaths grow shakier, drawing on the pain to make the tears come faster. “P-please,” he stammered.

Dream tilted his head. “Please what?”

Purpled bowed his head. “I’m sorry, Dream, I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to, I know it’s my fault--”

And then Dream was dragging him up by his hair and *shit did that hurt*. “Do you, Tommy?” he snarled. His sudden change of tone nearly gave Purpled whiplash. “Because it looks like you were blaming *me* for what *you* did.”

“I’m sorry!” Purpled shrieked, and he *loathed* how easily Tommy’s voice rose with terror. “Please, Dream! I’m sorry! I’m bad, I know I’m bad, I’m a terrible friend and I lied to you when you were just trying to help me!”

“*Purpled*,” Underscore said, and his voice was filled with so much horror that Purpled felt nauseous.

“You did,” Dream agreed. He released his grip on Purpled’s hair and Purpled fell forward, collapsing on his hands and knees. The urge to punch the bastard was almost overwhelming, but he just gritted his teeth and pushed through it. “You are a *terrible* friend.”

“I’m sorry,” Purpled repeated, choking out another fake sob. “I’m so sorry, Dream.”

A hand settled on his head. Purpled froze, his sensitive scalp stinging.

“It’s okay,” Dream said. “You can start over. *We* can start over.”

Success. Sweet, sweet success. Dream had fallen for the act.

Purpled looked up, eyes wide and hopeful. “R-really?”

Just for a second, Dream’s mask slipped. Something cruel and victorious flashed at the edge of his benevolent smile, poisonous and sharp as a knife. Purpled kept his glee tucked away, hidden in a corner of their heart. Because it was proof. Solid proof that Dream *knew* he was hurting them, that he wasn’t insane enough to think what he was doing was true friendship.

“Really,” Dream said. “I’ll forgive you, but you have to do what I say from now on.”

Purpled nodded fervently. “Anything, Dream. Fuck, I’m so sorry for attacking you, I don’t know what came over me--”

“I’ll let it slide. Just this once.”

“Thank you,” Purpled breathed. The urge to vomit bubbled in his gut, possibly from a combination of bad food and Underscore’s revulsion. “*Thank you*, Dream.”

Dream patted his head. Purpled swallowed bile. “Well then, you might want to get started then.”

“Started. . .?”

Dream swept an arm towards the remains of Logstedshire. “Rebuilding. By yourself.”

Underscore's flare of rage was *very* noticeable. Purpled had to speed this up, before Underscore snapped and tried to take over. He fell on a new tactic: reverse psychology.

"Wait," Purpled said. "You're. . . you're leaving?"

"Just for a bit," Dream said. "You still need to face. . . consequences for attacking me, Tommy, and frankly, I don't feel safe around you anymore."

"Wait, no!" Purpled scrambled to his feet, only to shrink back when Dream's head turned sharply towards him. "P-please, Dream, I'll be good, please don't leave me, *please--*"

"Tommy."

Purpled kept up his near-nonsensical stream of begging, reaching out to fist his bloody hands in Dream's cloak. The man sighed.

"Tommy, let go."

"*Please,*" Purpled gasped. "I can't-- I don't want to be alone anymore--"

The expected blow sent him reeling back. Dream lowered his hand, palm bright red to match the handprint mirrored on Tommy's face.

". . . I expect to see this place rebuilt when I come back. And don't forget to clean up that *pet* of yours."

He turned on his heel and stalked away. Silence descended on the beach.

"*What. . . the fuck. . . was **that**?!'*"

Purpled winced, scrubbing away the last of his tears with his dirt-crusting arm. "We needed him to leave," he muttered. "Fastest way to get him to leave is to give him what he wants."

"*You pretended-- you **pretended**-- why would you--?! Why would you give in to Dream like that?!'*"

Purpled knew Underscore was lashing out from self-hatred and terror, but Ran's residual anger and his own frustration were still clawing at him. He couldn't stop himself from snapping back. "Well I'm *sorry* for doing what we had to! Dream's gone now, that's all that matters!"

"*IT'S TOMMY'S BODY!*" Underscore shouted. "*You can't just pretend to--*"

"What, did you want Tommy to deal with that? Did you want him to sit there and *beg* Dream for *real*?"

Underscore fell silent.

"Exactly," Purpled muttered. The adrenaline was wearing off now, leaving him aching and exhausted and hounded by past demons he refused to think about. "Faking bought us some

time. Dream thinks he's won, so he'll let his guard down. He won't be back to check on Tommy for at least three days - we can get a head start. Now is Ran there? He knows where Technoblade's house is, right? We can--"

Without warning, Purpled found himself shunted into the back, a move not unlike what he'd done to Ran a few minutes earlier.

"*Tommy!*" Underscore made a sound of relief, only to freeze when the emotions hit him. "*T-Tommy?*"

The utter *despair* Tommy was radiating forcibly dragged Ran into awareness. He yelped, surprise crackling through their mindscape before he realized what was going on.

"*Tommy?*" Underscore sounded a bit desperate. "*Tommy, talk to us.*"

Tommy stared down at his bloodied hands, then up at the craters surrounding them. "It's. . . It's all gone," he croaked. "Everything's gone."

"*It's not the end,*" Purpled said. "*We have to go on.*"

"Everything's *gone*," Tommy repeated. The other three nearly choked on the sheer *anguish* that washed over them. "It's over. He destroyed it. He destroyed everything."

"*Not everything!*" Underscore tried to push back Tommy's emotions with a wave of *love-appreciation-care*, but the attempt fell flat. "*You still have us.*"

"And when he learns about you, he'll take you away too."

"*He won't,*" Ran said. "*He can't.*"

Tommy remained silent. He felt. . . off, like a thick coat of gray static had blanketed his emotions. It was almost like he was far away, obscured in a thick fog that none of them could break through. Underscore sent a probing flash of worry at him, but it seemed to evaporate before it reached him.

"*Tommy?*"

Tommy pushed himself to his feet and staggered across the beach, skirting around the craters. He crested a hill and stopped there, staring down at an empty patch of ground.

"*Tommy, talk to us.*"

Tommy pulled the stack of concrete from his inventory.

"*Tommy. . .?*"

Tommy began to tower.

There were no words for the rush of *terror* that exploded through the four of them, star-bright and dizzying. Ran lunged forward, trying to wrestle control from Tommy, but Tommy

maintained an iron grip.

“No! Tommy--”

“Stop--”

“Tommy!”

“Shut up,” Tommy murmured, his eyes fixed on the world below. The static grew thicker. “You’re making this harder.”

“You don’t need to do this,” Ran pleaded, radiating *fear-fear-fear* . ***“Please, Tommy.”***

“It’s all gone,” he reminded them. “He destroyed it. He destroyed Logstedshire. He killed Mushroom Henry.” His voice dropped down to a whisper. “He took away the last thing I had left.”

“What about us?”

And that. That stopped Tommy in his tracks.

Because if he died, the three of them died with him. Despite his lingering misgivings and the slim likelihood that they were just a part of his imagination, he’d grown to care about him. They’d been there for him, keeping his spirits up during the worst period of his life.

“Tommy?” Underscore asked. Tommy realized that he’d been silent for a while.

“Fuck,” he said, then exhaled shakily. The fog surrounding him dissipated. “I-- fuck, you’re right. I didn’t-- I wasn’t thinking.”

A wall of *relief* slammed into him. Tommy breathed through it with practiced ease. “Right,” he croaked. “Okay. New plan.”

He surveyed the area, eyes landing on the pool of water far below. “. . . How likely am I to miss that?”

“If you just slide off, you should land in it,” Purpled said. *“Just-- just don’t try to propel yourself away from the-- the tower.”*

Tommy took a deep breath. “Slide off,” he muttered. Twin flares of panic rose in his chest, followed by a wave of forced calm.

“Sorry,” Underscore and Ran said in unison.

Tommy grit his teeth and forced his shaking arms to move, shoving himself the last few inches forward. And then he was free-falling, wind whipping across his face. The panic returned full-force, a tangle of ice in his chest and he couldn’t tell if it was his or theirs.

He barely remembered to hold his breath before he hit the water. Air whooshed out of him anyway, precious bubbles spiraling towards the sky. He clawed after them, lungs screaming,

until his head broke the surface. From there, it was just a matter of dragging himself onto land.

"Let's never do that again," Ran suggested.

"Seconded," Underscore joked. Well-- it sounded like he was joking, but the creeping *fear-fear-fear* meant he was a hundred percent serious.

"I-- won't," Tommy groaned. The ocean breeze fluttered by, chilling his soaked clothes. "Fuckin' hell, it's *cold*."

"Start a fire?"

"Do we have time for it?" Purpled asked. *"How long does it take to get to Technoblade?"*

Ran hesitated. *"You said we had. . . three days, right? We have time. Getting to Techno should take less than a day. If you want, we have enough time to dry off and. . . and bury Mushroom Henry."*

Tommy turned back to the remains of Logstedshire, unconsciously scratching at the blood on his hands. The water had washed most of it away, but he could still feel it drying beneath his fingernails.

"Right," he whispered. ". . . Mushroom Henry."

Tommy folded his aching fingers over each other, bowing his head towards the simple wooden cross stabbed into the earth. Mushroom Henry deserved better. She deserved so much better, but his aching, bloodied fingers had no strength left in them. He'd used all he had left to dig her grave.

"Hey, girl," he said softly. His eyes burned. "I . . . I'm sorry. I'm sorry I let you die."

"It wasn't your fault," Underscore murmured. Tommy swallowed, the taste of blood and salt heavy on his tongue.

"I hope you're happier, free from this hellhole. I'm. . . I'm leaving too. For a better place. I hope." He laid a hand over the grave and closed his eyes. For a moment, he could almost pretend that the dirt beneath his fingers was her velvety head, butting him affectionately.

Grief rolled across the mindscape, echoing his own. *"She was loved,"* Ran murmured.

"She was," Tommy agreed.

Together, Tommy and his voices sat in silent vigil until the sun went down.

Tommy stared into the dying flames, letting the warmth roll over him. The stars wheeled overhead, dim through the smoke that rose from the ruins of Logstedshire. Every inch of his body ached with exhaustion.

“Almost done,” he muttered, pinching the fabric of his shirt between his fingers. Still a little damp, but a massive improvement from an hour ago. The other voices projected a vague sense of acknowledgement.

Tommy turned, letting the embers warm his back instead. He inhaled sharply as the bruise on his back flared, but squeezed his eyes shut and breathed through it. Unwittingly, his gaze strayed to the tower. With a start, he wrenched his eyes away, only to land on the silhouette of the Red Riot. Faint wisps of smoke still rose from its shattered remains, curling around the stars.

A loud *crack* echoed through their mind. Tommy doubled over, pupils constricting as he caught a glimpse of-- of-- something, a raging inferno, shattered glass, a jagged smile and wild eyes--

The crack slammed shut. *“I’m sorry, I-- I can’t,”* Purpled whispered, strained and heavy with exhaustion. *“It’s. . . I need to be alone.”*

He was gone before the others could respond.

Tommy inhaled, hands spasming around his knees. “Shit, that’s. . . bringing up bad memories for him, innit?”

“Yes,” Underscore and Ran answered in unison.

“Fuck,” Tommy ground out, then shook his head. A chill settled over his spine as the last of the fire died out. “Okay, so he’s. . . okay. What’s our plan?”

Ran hesitated. *“I . . . know where Technoblade lives.”*

Tommy stiffened, opening his mouth to protest. Ran barreled onwards. *“He helped Tommy in our timeline, too!”*

“Didn’t you say he destroyed L’Manberg?”

“He only did it because-- because he thought Tommy betrayed him! If we just-- avoid the community house confrontation, we should be fine.”

“He’s. . . a useful ally if you can gain his loyalty,” Underscore supplied. *“And there isn’t anywhere else you can go right now. Unless you want to strike out on your own, but we’re. . . you’re. . . not in good shape.”*

Tommy glowered at the ground. On one hand, he despised Technoblade. The man killed Tubbo and destroyed Tommy's country - and visited him in Exile just to laugh at him. In short, he was a bitch of the highest caliber.

On the other hand, all he wanted to do was *run*. He didn't want to sit here, surrounded by smoke and destruction. He had nothing and nowhere else to go.

Tommy closed his eyes and let air hiss between his teeth. “. . . Fuck. *Fine*. Which way do I go?”

Ran and Underscore couldn't quite hide their relief. “*Left,*” Ran said. “*Towards the forest. I'll tell you where to go.*”

Tommy forced himself to his feet. His legs shook under him, and he gritted his teeth, taking deep breaths until they stabilized. “Left,” he muttered to himself.

He trudged into the forest, leaving the smoldering ruins of his home behind.

this shelter of mine

Chapter Summary

The start of recovery. Technoblade has suspicions.

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: This fic is NOT an accurate source of mental health information. Do not take it as one. Descriptions of mental health conditions described/referenced here may be inaccurate.

TW: Dissociation, Referenced Torture and Abuse, Minor Body Horror, Implied Character Death

He was cold. So cold. His clothes had frozen against his skin. Everything had gone numb a while ago.

“Let me take over.”

Tommy squinted through his wavering vision and forced himself to take another step forward. His silence spoke for itself.

“Please.”

He could do this. *He could do this.* He couldn't let Underscore suffer through this. He just had to keep going. Keep moving forward, keep following Ran's directions. He'd find Technoblade.

He blinked and found himself facedown in the snow, blood roaring in his ears.

“Tommy,” Underscore pleaded. *“Let me take control. I'm used to the cold.”*

“F- fine,” Tommy bit out. He sank back, letting out a groan as the aching disappeared. Underscore brushed past him and grimaced as he was blasted full-force with the cold.

“Okay,” Underscore grunted. He forced their body up on shaking knees and staggered to his feet, squinting through the snow. *“I w-wore fu-cking t-sh-sh-irts in S-S-Snowchester. I c-can hand-dle this.”*

He forced one frozen leg in front of the other, ignoring the wind as it whipped at his face.

“Technoblade’s house should be up ahead,” Ran said. *“Not much farther, now.”*

Underscore marched onward with steady, mechanical movements. A faint light had become visible through the snow, a beacon of hope. As they drew closer, Tommy faded further back. Ran was left shifting uneasily in the front, practically vibrating with nervous energy that Underscore was too tired to respond to.

“I’ll talk to him,” he blurted when they reached the wooden steps. *“Technoblade, I mean. I-I know him better.”*

“B-be m-y-y g-guest,” Underscore groaned. He fell back, letting Ran take full control.

Ran hissed through his teeth as the full brunt of what they had been through hit him. He breathed through it, dimly aware of Tubbo retreating into unconsciousness and dragging Tommy down with him. He was on his own.

Grimacing, he continued up the stairs, staggering the last few feet to Technoblade’s door. Lifting one frostbitten fist, he whacked the oak panels.

There was no answer.

Ran counted to ten, then raised a hand to knock again. Before he could, the door swung open.

“ . . . Tommy?”

And Ran. Ran couldn’t move.

Because *Technoblade* was standing there, whole and alive. His eyes were clear of the insanity that had plagued him in his last moments. His dress shirt was pressed clean and white, unstained by dirt or blood or--

To his horror, Ran found tears welling up in his eyes. Not only was crying extremely out of character for Tommy, he also needed to conserve water. But--

Technoblade was alive. *Technoblade was alive.*

He shuddered, mouth opening and closing, but no words came out. Hot tears burned their way down his frozen cheeks. Technoblade shifted, and was that *concern* in his gaze?

“ . . . Come in,” he said, stepping aside. Ran shuffled into the house, a choked noise slipping from his lips as *warmth* rolled over him. His shaking legs folded under him and he collapsed to the floor, knees knocking against wooden panes with an ugly *crack*. They were going to feel that later, but at the moment he couldn’t bring himself to care.

Technoblade was alive.

Technoblade was kneeling in front of him, face set with well-hidden worry. He was saying something, but his voice just flowed past Ran’s ears. Everything felt far away and muffled, like he had been wrapped in a thick layer of cotton.

He was safe. He was *home*.

Ran let himself drift away.

Purpled awoke to agony.

“Ngh,” he groaned. Everything hurt. He couldn’t think. The world was needle-sharp, the air picking at his skin until it cracked and wept blood.

A figure leaned over him, face shadowed in the dim candlelight. Their only identifying feature was the silhouette of their wild, tangled hair. Quackity. Purpled cringed back, pressing himself as far into the corner as possible. “N-no,” he rasped.

Quackity reached out, only to pause when Purpled flinched. “Please,” he slurred. “No-- no more. ‘M sorry. Please.”

Quackity hesitated, and then reached out again. Purpled winced as he peeled something - a cloth? - off of his forehead. He squinted at the object through hazy vision. Maybe it was a new way of infusing potions. He’d heard of Healing patches before-- why not Harming?

He shuddered, and agony rippled through his body. It was easy to bring tears to his eyes. Sometimes, if he acted pathetic enough, Quackity would get bored and leave him alone.

No luck this time. Quackity returned with another patch. “No,” Purpled muttered, trying to turn his head away. “Stop, stop. . .”

Quackity said something. His voice sounded *off*, somehow, but Purpled couldn’t even pick out the individual words. He just lay there as another patch was applied to his forehead. Weak. Helpless. He *hated* it.

Cold seeped into his skull, icy water dribbling down his forehead and cleaving through his fever. The pounding in his head reached a crescendo.

Purpled fled from consciousness, and the world went dark.

Tubbo woke up burning.

His eyes snapped open. An unfamiliar wood ceiling swam above him. This wasn’t the bunker. Where was he? How did he get here? Where was Ranboo?

“You’re awake.”

Tubbo’s head whipped up, gaze landing on the man standing in the doorway. A flash of pink hair caught his eye, and his heart dropped when he realized who it was.

Technoblade.

(Eyes crazed, the unsettling grin carved across his face, hair and face and clothes streaked with blood. Red, so much red, crimson vines writhing under his skin, his hands wrapped around the hilt of the bloodied Axe of Peace. He was laughing, always laughing, quiet and hoarse and dark. There was nothing human left, just the voices, Infected and driven mad by their own bloodlust--)

Technoblade took a step forward.

*No no no get away get **away**--*

He tried to vault off the couch, but his feet tangled with the blanket and he crashed to the floor instead. He barely felt the pain, scrabbling at the ground with his bandaged fingers in a desperate attempt to drag himself away. Technoblade was talking, but Tubbo couldn’t hear him over the pounding of his heart.

This was where he died. Technoblade was going to kill him. Technoblade was going to carve his heart out and drag his corpse to the Egg and then he would be eaten, eaten like the Egg had eaten Tommy, except Tommy had been alive and *no don’t think don’t think about--*

Hands closed around his shoulders. Tubbo thrashed, snarling, trying to throw them off. His fever-weakened limbs smacked against the floor. Useless. Always so useless. Where was his sword? He needed it, he needed to--

Technoblade hoisted him up, pinning him against his chest. He’d left his arms free. Tubbo reached back and tried to claw his eyes out, but the piglin hybrid twisted his head away.

His hearing was filtering back in. “*Calm down*,” Technoblade was saying. “Calm down, Tommy, I’m not going to hurt you!”

Tommy?

Tubbo stilled, feverish mind whirling with confusion.

It was a mistake. The instant he let up his attack, Technoblade shoved him onto the couch and drew a bottle from his inventory. Tubbo lunged forward, but it was too late. The potion smashed open across the floor, grey mist swirling through the air. Tubbo made one last desperate attempt to reach Technoblade, but his legs collapsed under him.

The last thing he saw was Technoblade’s grim expression.

Tommy woke up warm.

He blinked up at the sunlit ceiling, reveling in the softness of. . . whatever he was lying on. It wasn't snow or dirt, which was a good sign, but he also had no idea what it was - or *where* he was, for the matter.

Gingerly, he sat up, eyeing the blanket draped over him. Where was he? How'd he get here? The last thing he remembered was handing control over to Tubbo, out there in the snow.

"Gonna attack me again?"

Tommy's head snapped to the side. *Technoblade* was standing by the fireplace, his arms crossed and eyebrows furrowed.

"Wha--" Tommy's voice cracked. Technoblade wordlessly pointed to the table near the head of the couch, where a glass of water waited. Tommy eyed it for a moment, then decided that if Technoblade wanted him dead, he would have just stabbed him while he was sleeping. He picked up the cup and--

"*Slow sips,*" Purpled warned. He sounded off, subdued, though his emotions were once again locked behind an iron wall. Tommy made a mental note to talk to him later. "*Don't chug. Your body can't handle that yet.*"

Tommy scowled around the rim of the cup but complied, drinking in small sips. Ignoring Technoblade's burning stare, he mentally poked at the three voices. Purpled sent the impression of an eye roll while Underscore shifted, flaring with weak irritation. Ran was conspicuously absent.

He set the empty cup down on the table and licked his lips, then glared at the piglin hybrid. "What're you lookin' at?"

Technoblade's lips thinned into a neutral line. "What's the last thing you remember?"

Fuck. *Fuuuuck*. Ran was still out, but he was the only one who knew what had happened. If he didn't tell Technoblade how he wound up there, Technoblade would start asking *questions*. He didn't want the voices to get exposed. They weren't ready yet. *He* wasn't ready yet. None of them trusted Technoblade enough.

"*Play it off,*" Purpled said. "*Pretend you were so out of it that you don't remember.*"

Okay, that could work. Tommy shrugged, hands twisting in the blanket. "I was walking."

"Walking where?"

Tommy scowled. "Away."

"From Exile?"

“*Away*. I don’t see how this is any of your business--”

“It *is* my business,” Technoblade retorted. “You showed up at my doorstep half-dead, started cryin’, and then dissociated for a *full hour* before you passed out from a combination of hypothermia, malnutrition, your fever, and exhaustion. And apparently you don’t even remember findin’ me-- what *happened*, Tommy?”

“***Shit***,” Underscore hissed. Tommy pressed a hand to his chest, exhaling through the *fear-worry-rage*. “***Shit, Boo--***”

“*I’ll check on him*,” Purpled muttered. He retreated into the back.

“Uh.” Tommy knew he should start blustering about how nothing had happened, but his mouth was dry and his ability to bullshit was severely impaired by memories of smoke and fire and blood. “It’s, uh. Um. Things. Things happened.”

Technoblade’s unimpressed stare could have withered grass. Tommy wilted. “Look, I just-- don’t want to talk about it right now, yeah?” He thought of the tower and shuddered, gaze drifting to the side. “It’s-- I’m still processing.”

“Processing,” Technoblade repeated. Tommy met his eyes with as much defiance as he could muster.

To Tommy and his headmates’ collective surprise, the piglin hybrid sighed and turned away. “I’ll get you more water,” he grunted, and shuffled out of the room. Tommy was left staring at the empty doorway.

“Did. . . Technoblade just back down?” he asked.

“*I wasn’t expecting him to give up*,” Underscore confessed. “*Though to be fair, I don’t have the best impression of him.*”

At that moment, a dim confusion bloomed in Tommy’s mind. Tommy sat up. “Ran!” he blurted, then hastily lowered his voice. “You’re back!”

“*Mm*,” Ran agreed blearily, shaking off the lingering shadow of *grief-loss-relief* that hovered at the edges of their awareness. “*I. . . how long have I been out?*”

Tommy and Underscore paused, exchanging the mental equivalent of an uncertain glance. “*Um*,” said Underscore. “*We’re. . . we’re not sure, actually.*”

“*I’d say at least two days*,” Purpled said. When the other three sparked with a combination of *surprise-curiosity-worry*, he elaborated. “*The window. It’s around late afternoon right now - the light’s still strong, but the sky’s too dark for it to be midday. We got here around. . . midnight, I’d say, and the clouds were much heavier then. The sky’s clear - takes at least a day for cloud cover to dissolve.*”

“*Ah*,” said Ran. “*Two days. That’s. Hm.*” He carefully tucked his alarm away as the others politely pretended not to notice. “*Then, uh, what happened while I was out?*”

Technoblade sighed as he spun the tap shut. Lifting the mug in his hands, he trundled back towards his living room and his mission of playing glorified nursemaid. This was his life now. If his enemies could see him now, they'd be howling with laughter.

Not that his voices were doing much better. Sure, they weren't laughing - but they were *cooing*, which was objectively worse. Oh, they'd been a mess of chaotic rage when he first saw Tommy - but sometime across the four days he'd spent tending to him, the *help-protect-KILL* had turned into various cries of *aww* and *Brotherblade!*

Speaking of, Chat had begun another wave of *aww*-ing. Technoblade's eye twitched. "Stop that," he told them as he approached the living room.

"--so I have no idea."

Technoblade stopped in his tracks. That was Tommy. But no one else was in the room with him, so who--?

"Great," Tommy muttered. "Should I ask Techno?"

A pause. Tommy made a frustrated noise. "You said we could trust him--"

Technoblade cleared his throat. Tommy jumped, then yelped and clamped a hand over his ribs. "Ow ow ow," he hissed, leveling Technoblade with a glare. "How long have you been standing there?!"

"Who were you talkin' to?"

"Myself, dumbass," Tommy snapped back. Technoblade stared at him for a moment longer, then grunted and held out the mug.

It was possible that he really *was* talking to himself - perhaps a byproduct of long-term isolation. However, people who talked to themselves also tended to *respond* to themselves - which meant it was far more likely that Tommy was talking to someone only he could hear.

He wasn't a hybrid, as far as Technoblade was aware, but it was possible that he had some ancestor back in the line. Anyone with hybrid lineage within three generations was liable to develop voices - or, as Technoblade called them, a Chat. The voices usually developed after a period of high stress, and Tommy's behavior in his less lucid state had been pretty indicative of a traumatic experience.

Tommy had looked at him and seen someone else. Had begged for him to stop as he laid a cold towel over his forehead to fight his raging fever. Had fought like a hunted animal, and stared at him like he expected to be slaughtered like one. Had been running from something, something that drove him to the brink of death.

And then there were his physical injuries. Fresh burn scars in a dotted starburst pattern that could only come from close proximity to an explosion. Barely-healed scratches from mishandled weaponry that spoke of a lack of self-preservation. Bruises - so many bruises. Patches of green across his knees. An ugly shock of violet right above his spine, which Technoblade had caught an eyeful of when he checked Tommy for injuries. Other bruises layered over each other in various stages of healing, spotting his ribcage and legs. And most damning of all, the mauve handprints laid across his arms and face.

The clues lined up to produce a very unpleasant picture.

Questioning Tommy wasn't going to get him anywhere - the boy had already made that clear enough. No, he needed to observe. If his theory was correct. . .

Technoblade sent up a silent prayer to whatever greater force in existence that he was wrong.

"No," Tommy snapped. "Absolutely the fuck *not*."

Technoblade peered at him from across the table, brows furrowed with irritation. "Look, before you pass judgement, hear me out. I'm not askin' you to betray L'Manberg, just to stay out of the way."

"*Take the deal,*" Underscore interrupted before Tommy could protest. Tommy couldn't quite hide the shock that flashed across his face. Technoblade, thankfully, didn't appear to notice. "*It's best to ally with Technoblade right now. Trust me, Tommy.*"

Tommy wished he could speak in his mind. Unfortunately, whoever had control of the body could only communicate aloud - which Tommy couldn't do, given that Technoblade was sitting in front of him.

So he shoved a whole bundle of *hurt-betrayal-rage* at Underscore instead. Underscore recoiled like he'd been burned. "*You don't have to actually agree!*" he yelped. "*I'm not-- I don't want him to destroy L'Manberg, Tommy, you **know** I don't, but while you're recovering you can't get on his bad side!*"

Tommy took a moment to breathe through his fury and *think*. Underscore had a point - like it or not, he needed Technoblade. The man could feed him, shelter him and protect him from Dream - and all he wanted was for Tommy to stay out of the way.

". . . Fine," Tommy ground out. "I'll agree, but only if you promise not to kill anyone."

"I won't attack anyone who attacks me first," Technoblade said. Which made the promise essentially useless, given that every citizen of L'Manberg would attack Technoblade to defend their country.

Tommy glared.

“... I won't take anyone's last life,” Technoblade compromised. “And I won't, uh, completely destroy L'Manberg. Just commit minor acts of terrorism to convince them that government isn't the way.”

Tommy wasn't sure why he was bending to Tommy's demands, but he wasn't about to look a gift horse in the mouth. “Fine,” he agreed shortly. “I'll stay out of your way, and you don't raze my home to bedrock and kill all my friends.” He reached a hand across the table. “You got a deal.”

For a moment, Technoblade actually looked a little *guilty*. The expression disappeared before Tommy could really register it, though, and the piglin hybrid reached back to clasp their hands together and shake. “Good doin' business with you, Tommy.”

Two days into Tommy's stay, Technoblade could safely say that his initial theory was wrong. Unfortunately, the alternative wasn't any less grim.

It started when Tommy asked Technoblade for training (a request he denied, on the premise of waiting until he was decently healthy). Thing was, Technoblade was about eighty percent sure that Tommy wasn't. . . Tommy. There wasn't any specific thing that tipped him off - it was just his overall aura, or, as the voices put it, “his vibes were off”. His body language wasn't quite right. His smiles were too fake. He flat-out didn't feel like *Tommy* to Technoblade's instincts, and Technoblade trusted his instincts.

Conclusion: Tommy wasn't always Tommy. Which either meant the voices were somehow capable of taking over Tommy's body while simultaneously retaining the appearance of being an individual (which was impossible, because Technoblade *knew* what a voice-posessed hybrid looked like), or Tommy didn't have voices at all.

He'd heard of similar cases. Multiple people living in one body, born from trauma nobody should ever experience. Characterized by visible changes in *everything*, from personality to voice to countenance. And Tommy *had* just gone through severe trauma - it was possible that his mind had splintered to cope.

He did have to admit that there was a problem with the theory. All recorded cases noted that the condition appeared in early childhood - but Tommy was a teenager, and had shown no signs of other identities in Pogtopia. Furthermore, aside from the night Tommy had arrived, there was a distinct lack of disassociation episodes.

Still, this theory fit much better than the idea of voices. At the very least, he'd have to assume that there was someone who was *not* Tommy in Tommy's head. Technoblade would play this by ear, then; keep an eye on Tommy, figure out how many Not-Tommy's there were, then map an approach to the situation depending on what he observed. A foolproof plan.

He ignored how his gut twisted at the implications of the new theory.

"Do you think he knows?"

Tommy opened his eyes to glare up at the shadowed ceiling. "Really, boob boy? *Now?*"

"Sorry," Ran murmured, a glimmer of sheepish curiosity prodding the edges of their mindscape. *"It's just. . . Technoblade isn't stupid. Do you think he's noticed us?"*

"He definitely suspects something," Underscore murmured. *"He's been staring at us--"*

"He's just being a creep," Tommy grumbled. "And we hid it from-- from Dream pretty well--"

"Technoblade isn't Dream. And we didn't spend this much time with Dream, either."

Purpled met their rising anxiety with cold logic. *"Calm down. Even if he knows about us, there's no way he'd figure out the time travel without us telling him. Let him make his own assumptions."*

Purpled had a point, but. . . "I don't want him to know about you," Tommy admitted. The words clogged in his throat. "I don't-- I don't want him to *ask* about you--"

Underscore projected a sense of steely determination. *"Don't worry, Tommy. If he confronts you, we can handle it."*

"And we can come up with a plan tomorrow," Purpled added. *"It's too late right now. Go to sleep."* His attention turned towards Ran. *"And Ran-- stop asking questions when Tommy's trying to sleep."*

"Sorry," Ran muttered, chastised. With a huff, Tommy pulled his blankets up to his chin and shut his eyes.

Sleep didn't come easily to any of them that night.

As far as Technoblade could tell, there were at least three distinct identities - or, 'voices', as he was going to refer to them - besides Tommy. He'd mentally dubbed them the cold one, the happy one, and the angry one.

The cold one was. . . cold. They did their best to imitate Tommy, but there was an underlying apathy present in every movement that gave a plastic quality to their smiles and raised Technoblade's metaphorical hackles. He did appreciate, however, the voice's sense of

sarcasm - their dry wit could match Technoblade's, when they let down their guard enough to get in a verbal spar with him. Unfortunately, more often than not, they would catch themselves in the middle of a sarcastic quip and shut down, instead pulling on a veneer of bright cheer in the hopes of imitating Tommy's crude sense of humor. It was rather painful to watch.

The happy one. . . wasn't always happy, but they were certainly a good deal more cheerful in Technoblade's presence than either of their three compatriots. When something upset them, though, they grew nervous, stuttering often and curling into themselves as though they were trying to shrink. They also exhibited a number of self-soothing behaviors that made them instantly distinguishable from Tommy: a shuffling walk, a hunched spine, fluttering hands clasping and unclasping. They also seemed oddly averse to eye contact, though as the days wore on, they became a bit more comfortable. Out of all of the voices, they smiled the most - real, genuine smiles, not the fake 'Tommy' ones they pasted on. They were gentle, rather out-of-place on Tommy's face. The first time Technoblade saw one, the only thing he could think of was how *young* that expression made Tommy look.

And then there was the angry one. Technoblade didn't know what he'd done to earn the voice's ire, but every interaction with them felt inexplicably passive-aggressive. The way they smiled, the way they talked, the way they *moved*-- it was almost like they were constantly insulting him in the safety of their mind. Ironically, this voice was also the best at imitating Tommy; in fact, it had taken Technoblade a while to realize that they were actually a different person.

Hm. Maybe that said more about Tommy than it did about the voice.

At least he could confirm that the voices didn't seem to hurt Tommy - the exact opposite, actually, based on what he'd gathered from snippets of overheard, one-sided conversations. Tommy never showed any signs of distress whenever he switched. Still, it was rather jarring to see how seamlessly they changed - Technoblade could be talking to Tommy one moment, only to blink and find himself face to face with a voice in the next. Sometimes, it was difficult to tell who he was talking to at all - their tells blurred together, and though Technoblade disliked the uncertainty, he no choice but to follow the flow of the conversation until they became more distinct.

For all his observation, though, there was nothing he could do. It wasn't his place to confront Tommy about what happened in exile - and the voices were a part of that.

So instead Technoblade waited. Technoblade watched. And slowly, Technoblade learned to adapt.

"Technoblade!" Tommy cried. The man he had never dared to call his friend turned around, and Tommy wanted to cry with relief. He was alive, he was safe, he was--

Technoblade cocked his head to the side. A constant stream of mumbling flowed from his lips, ebbing and flowing in time to the Crimson vines that pulsed under his skin.

Tommy froze in his tracks. Technoblade scanned him with bland curiosity. Abruptly, he lurched forward, pupils constricting as the muttering grew louder.

“--boo? Ranboo! Boo! Aww it’s Walmart Techno! Hi! Hello! What can we do for you?”

Tommy swallowed. “T-Techno, you’re. . . you’re Infected.”

Technoblade frowned. “Not Techno. We are Infected. Thanks for pointing that out! Still not Techno, though. Techno’s gone. No he isn’t. He’s here! He isn’t! We ate him! He’s one of us now. At least we found the blood god! It’s red, red everywhere. . .”

Tommy took a step back. With trembling hands, he unsheathed his sword. It had been quenched in holy water, capable of warding off the Crimson. Technoblade blinked at it.

“Sword? Sword. Aw, wittle baby enderboy wants to fight us! Blood? Ha, he’s gonna get demolished.”

“I don’t want to fight you,” Tommy said. His voice shook.

“Then don’t. Duh. He’s trying to talk us down? He knows he can’t win.”

“Techno, please. Remember Phil? He’s-- he’s safe, Techno. He didn’t get infected.”

“Phil! Philza! We love Phil! He’ll be safer with the blood god. You’ll be too! Join us, Ranboo.”

“Techno,” Tommy pleaded. One last time. One last chance.

“Not Techno,” the voices said. And then they lunged.

Tommy knew he had no chance against Technoblade, not when he couldn’t bring himself to fight him. Choking on a sob, he turned to run. Technoblade was on him a moment later, clawed hands reaching out to wrap around Tommy’s neck, but between one second and the next Tommy was stumbling into a tree, the dizzying sensation of teleportation tugging at his gut. He threw himself into a sprint as Technoblade shrieked behind him, speeding up when he heard the familiar sound of a sword being drawn. “Stop running, Ranboo!” his pursuer called. “Come embrace the-- urk!”

There was a loud thud. Tommy risked a glance over his shoulder to see that Technoblade had dropped his sword, and was now clutching his head, rocking back and forth. “No, no, no, no,” he snarled. “Don’t. Don’t hurt him. Blood for the blood god. Not his. Why not? Not him.”

Tommy’s heart dropped into his stomach. “T-Techno?”

What remained of Technoblade looked up at him, features twisted in an anguished snarl. “Run, Ranboo,” he rasped. “Run, please-- BLOOD-- NO-- RUN! BLOOD! BLOOD FOR

THE BLOOD-- STOP--

Tommy backed away. Technoblade abruptly fell silent, and with smooth, robotic movements, picked up his sword.

“Annoying,” he murmured. One eye twitched wildly, but he didn’t seem to notice. “Where? Ranboo. Blood now? Red? More red?”

“Techno,” Tommy whispered.

Technoblade blinked, then shook his head like it was shaking off a fly. His eye stopped twitching.

“Gone now,” he stated simply. “Blood for the blood god. No more interruptions. So much red. We’re hungry! Blood for the blood god.”

“T-Techno--”

Technoblade lunged, a wild grin carving itself across his face--

--safe. You’re in my house, Tommy. Nobody’s gonna hurt you. Breathe. C’mo--

Tommy *screamed*, lashing out and meeting flesh. His attacker staggered back, and Tommy took the reprieve to roll to his feet, drawing his iron sword. Ran snapped into front beside him a moment later, a roiling mess of *terror-guilt-horror*.

“No,” he wailed, as Tommy took control of their neck to glance wildly around the room. Their leg was pressed against what felt like a bed. Soft moonlight spilled in through the window, illuminating their surroundings. It also illuminated their attacker, who hovered warily a few feet away, one hand raised to defend his chest.

Ran spoke for them. “T-Techno?”

“T-Techno?”

“Tommy,” Technoblade returned. He wasn’t quite sure if the one in control was *actually* Tommy, but their fighting stance were familiar enough for him to assume so. “. . . Do you recognize where you are?”

“Your house. It was a nightmare,” Tommy realized. “You were trying to wake us up.”

Technoblade dipped his head, mentally filing the “us” away as more evidence under the “multiple people” theory. He opened his mouth to speak again, only to find himself with an armful of sobbing teenager. “Wha--” he started, then cut himself off with a sigh when said teenager’s grip tightened. “Okay. It’s going to be okay, Tommy.”

Well, not Tommy now. This was probably the happy one, the only voice that seemed to like Technoblade. They were currently an emotional mess, alternating between warbling cries of grief and nonsensical apologies. As far as Technoblade could tell, the voice hadn't done anything to wrong him, so they were probably still wrapped up in the nightmare. The only thing he could do was calm them down.

Based on previous observation, this voice liked physical contact. So he began patting them on the back, wiggling his other arm out of the awkward hug they had trapped him in so he could return the gesture. "You're in my house," he told them. "You're safe. Nobody's gonna hurt you."

If anything, Not-Tommy just started crying *harder*. Great. Wonderful. Technoblade was probably the *least* qualified person for a situation like this. What had he done for them to get so attached to him?

Thankfully, Not-Tommy pulled away from the hug a minute later and wiped at their face with their sleeves. Technoblade could only hover awkwardly as they gathered themselves. Just as he began to consider quietly slipping out, the voice spoke.

"Train me."

Technoblade blinked. "... What?"

"Train me," the voice repeated, red-rimmed eyes shining with determination. "Please, Techno."

Technoblade chanced a glance at the clock on the nightstand and winced at what he saw. Now was not a good time to be making important decisions.

"We'll talk about this tomorrow," he compromised. "In the morning."

The voice didn't look very happy, but they dipped their head in acquiescence. Technoblade nodded back, already turning to the door. He was halfway out of the room when the voice spoke again.

"Thank you," they said. "For. For not asking."

Technoblade's hand twitched on the doorknob. He didn't turn around.

"... Go back to bed, Tommy. You need rest."

Without waiting for a reply, he stepped into the hallway and shut the door.

"You can't add to our agreement."

“Oh c’mon, Techno, *please*--”

“No.” Technoblade crossed his arms and met Tommy’s wheedling with an unimpressed glare. “The terms are set. I already agreed to change my plans for you - I’m not about to *train* you too, not unless you plan on sidin’ with me.”

Which Tommy wouldn’t do in a million years, and they both knew it. Tommy scowled.

“*Ran?*” Underscore prodded at Ran. “*You knew-- know him best - do you have any ideas?*”

“*. . . Let me talk to him,*” Ran murmured.

Tommy fell back, letting Ran slide into front. The voice took a moment to readjust to having a physical form, then straightened up.

“Techno,” he said. “I’m healed enough to fight. I can handle it.”

“Right, but *why* do you need me to train you?” Technoblade’s eyes narrowed. “And why should I? What’s in it for me?”

Tommy surged forward, a litany of curses on his tongue, but Ran rebuffed him with a wave of calm. “*Let Ran try his plan,*” Purpled said. “*If it doesn’t work, you can try your way again.*”

Ran, meanwhile, took a deep breath and bowed his head. “There’s nothing in it for you,” he answered. There was nothing but honesty in his voice. “But. . . I want you to train me because-- I’m scared. I’m scared for my friends. Dream’s out there, and he-- he could hurt them like he hurt me.” This was the closest they’d ever gotten to referencing what happened in Exile since they’d come to Technoblade, and Ran knew Technoblade would understand the weight of his words. “I-I have to get stronger. I have to protect them. I-I swear I won’t use anything you teach me against you. We can-- we can make another deal, if you want-- I don’t. . . have much to offer in exchange, but--”

“That won’t be necessary.”

Ran snuck a glance at Technoblade, who appeared to be deep in thought. Hope sparked in their chest.

After what felt like an eternity, the piglin hybrid huffed, shoulders slumping. “You really know how to make a convincing argument, kid.”

Ran backed away, letting Tommy take over again. “Damn right I do,” the teenager boasted, though the false pride in his voice was tempered with uncertainty. “So. . . you’ll teach me?”

“Don’t get ahead of yourself.” Technoblade raised a clawed finger, forestalling Tommy’s protest. “You might not be sick anymore, but you’re still underweight. We need to get back some of your muscle mass before we do any actual trainin’.”

Tommy had to admit that Technoblade had a point. “Fine, bitch.”

“You know,” Technoblade mused. “It’s polite to thank someone when they agree to train you.”

Tommy’s retort was interrupted by a series of thumps against the front door.

“Technoblade? Technoblade, are you home?”

Tommy's blood turned to ice in his veins. Slowly, he looked up at Technoblade, who looked back, equally surprised.

"It's me, Dream." Another knock. "Open the door, I need to talk to you."

such warmth in midwinter

Chapter Summary

Tommy is both a therapist and in need of therapy. Technoblade. . . is trying his best. also purpled healing arc :D

Chapter Notes

guys. guys I swear my chapter count's gonna be under 10 I just don't know *which number* yet-- I have an outline but the chapters *keep growing*-- fair warning: this chapter isn't my best - it was written across several months so the quality and tone fluctuates a lot. I apologize in advance asjdklfds

TW: Violence, Graphic Character Death, Referenced Abuse, Vomiting. If any of those trigger you, just skip the entire italicized segment and see the summary in endnotes.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The world froze. Frost bloomed in Tommy's lungs. He choked, hands jerking as he fought to move, to dive, to *hide* somewhere where Dream couldn't find him--

Technoblade slid into his field of vision, one hand falling upon his shoulder. "Tommy," the piglin hybrid whispered. "There's a hidden cabinet under that table right there - see how the edges stick out? Push those in and hide in there."

Tommy wanted to snap back, to tell him he wasn't stupid-- but the fear curled around his heart paralyzed him. In the back of his mind, he heard Underscore curse. A moment later, *rage-protect-HATE* blasted through his senses, burning away the frost. Tommy flinched, slamming face-first back into reality.

"Technoblade?" Dream called again. "Are you home?"

Technoblade's hand lifted from his shoulder. "Go," the piglin hybrid hissed before he swept towards a chest and began shoving items into his inventory.

"*Hide*," Underscore ordered. "**Now.**"

Purpled shifted forward, an offer to take over. "*Do you need me to. . .?*"

Tommy was tempted. He was very tempted. But he couldn't always lean on Purpled. He had to face Dream eventually, and when he did, he'd stand on his own power.

"No," Tommy whispered. He glanced at Technoblade, who thankfully appeared to be too occupied with the chest to pay attention to him. "Stay back. I can handle this."

"... Okay. Offer's still open if you need it."

Tommy nodded to show that he understood before crawling into the cabinet. He hooked one finger around the edge of the door and used the momentum to swing it shut. A moment later, he heard Technoblade cross the room. The creaking of rusted hinges heralded the entry of Tommy's worst nightmare.

"Technoblade!" Dream's voice was filled with carefully crafted cheer. "How are you?"

"Dream," Technoblade returned, his flat monotone tinged with *just* enough irritation to be believable. "What do you want."

Dream laughed. "No need to be so defensive!" A second set of footsteps had Tommy tensing, shrinking further back into the cabinet.

"Don't track snow into my house." Something scraped against the floor, and a moment later the thud of the door shutting reverberated through the wall at Tommy's back. "I was in the middle of somethin', Dream."

"Oh?"

"Reorganizin'." There was a muffled clunk, like a chest lid being hefted open. "You interrupted my rhythm."

"Sorry about that." Dream didn't sound very sorry. "I'll be out of your hair soon enough. I just wanted to ask if you've seen Tommy."

It took every ounce of Tommy's willpower not to flinch back. He stuffed his hand in his mouth, strangling the whimper that tried to crawl out of his throat. He had to be quiet, he couldn't move, if Dream found him he'd be worse than dead--

He shut his eyes against the thought and tried to make himself very, very small.

"I just wanted to ask if you've seen Tommy."

Blood, blood, blood, Chat chanted. Technoblade ignored them. "Tommy," he hummed. "... No, can't say I have. Why're you lookin' for him?"

Something in Dream's demeanor *shifted*, so subtle that if Technoblade hadn't been looking for it, he would have missed it. "He. . . ran away from exile."

"Shouldn't you be lookin' for him in L'Manberg or the Mainland then?"

"He's not there."

Years of practice allowed Technoblade to affect a look of puzzlement without actually changing his expression. ". . . Then that's fine, right? Long as he's not where he's exiled from--"

"Look," Dream interrupted, clearly growing impatient. "I just need to know if you've seen him or not."

"I told you I haven't," Technoblade grumbled. "Now can I get back to my organizin'?"

"You haven't seen him at *all*?"

"No."

Dream tilted his head. "Then you wouldn't mind if I took a look around."

Technoblade stared into the mocking smile on Dream's mask and tried to formulate an appropriate answer. The *threat* drawn into every line of Dream's body was dredging up certain memories, ones he'd rather not think about while trying to play diplomat with the man.

On one of his hunting trips, he'd made a little detour to Logstedshire. He'd seen the makeshift grave formed from blood-churned dirt. He'd seen the tower climbing up to the stars. He'd recognized the calculated brutality written into the ashes, the cold logic carved in the rubble-strewn craters, the *color* of the scrap of cloth left in the bloodstained grass, torn from a viridian cloak by the desperate hands of a child who had lost everything--

There were a lot of things Technoblade wanted to say to Dream. *Is the handprint on Tommy's face yours? Were you the one who broke his mind? Did you drive him to build that tower?*

Would you bleed red if I ran you through with my sword?

"Do whatever you want," he said instead, and stepped aside with faux casualness. "Just don't mess everythin' up. I'm not reorganizin' *again*."

Dream brushed past him. Technoblade's skin *crawled*, but he forced himself not to flinch at the contact. Instead he turned back to his chest, adjusting his position to keep Dream in his peripheral vision as the man moved around the room. He kept a hand close to his inventory, ready to step in if Dream discovered the hidden compartment.

Thankfully, Dream soon moved on to the next floor. Technoblade shut the chest and followed, keeping up a stream of light conversation to let Tommy know where they were. It wasn't until they were outside of Tommy's room that Technoblade realized his oversight.

Dream peered through the open door, surveying the sparsely-decorated walls. “Who lives here?”

Technoblade thanked every higher power that one of the voices (because Prime knew Tommy never cleaned up after himself) had made Tommy’s bed that morning. “That’s the guest room. Phil sleeps there whenever he visits.”

“Hmm.” Dream shuffled deeper into the room and began poking around. Technoblade watched, careful to keep his stance relaxed.

Tommy always kept his belongings in his inventory. That paranoia paid off; Dream didn’t find anything Technoblade couldn’t excuse away as Philza’s. He lingered a bit more, but was eventually forced to move on when Technoblade began dropping subtle hints that he didn’t appreciate Dream intruding on “Philza’s” space.

They wandered through the rest of the house. Other than the snarky comments Technoblade made when Dream began searching through his room (“Ah yes, of course I’m hidin’ a teenager under my bed. That was a joke, Dream, you didn’t need to look under the bed--”), there was nothing Dream could reasonably find suspicious. At last, the man admitted defeat and returned to the ground floor. He stopped a few feet from the door, purposefully ignoring Technoblade’s deadpan stare.

“Well, I’m glad to see you alive and well.”

Fake, Chat hissed. Technoblade was quite inclined to agree.

Dream shifted, head tilting to the side. “I will say. . . you owe me, a little bit.”

“Yeah, that’s true.” Technoblade forced his lips to curve into a smirk. “No need to worry, Dream. I’m a person that believes in *absolute* reciprocity.”

Or at least, he had been before this entire debacle. Technoblade believed in repaying his debts, but repaying a debt to a man who had *shattered* a child. . . left a bad taste in his mouth.

Dream stared at him for a moment, gaze unreadable. Then the tension melted from his shoulders. “Okay,” he said mildly. “Well, if you catch wind of Tommy, let me know.”

“I will.”

“Alright.” Dream lingered in the doorway, obviously reluctant to go. When Technoblade didn’t make any move to continue the conversation, he was forced to concede. “. . . Well. Nice to see you.”

“Bye, Dream.”

Tommy wasn't sure when he stopped breathing.

Static buzzed at the edges of his vision. He could feel himself slipping into the nothingness, teetering on the verge of checking out. Only the others' presences, steady by his side, kept him grounded.

Through the thin wooden panels, he heard the front door click shut. There was a moment of silence before Technoblade let out a sigh. The floorboards creaked beneath his weight, growing progressively louder as he moved closer. A moment later, the cabinet door swung open. "Tommy, it's safe to come out now."

Tommy didn't move. He felt. . . floaty, like a thin layer of static had coated his vision. Someone on the other side was prodding at him through the film, but they couldn't quite reach him.

". . . Tommy?" Technoblade was crouched a few feet away from the entrance of the box. "C'mon, kid. You gotta come out at some point."

"*Tommy,*" Underscore said. His voice sounded tinny, like it was coming through an old radio. "*Tommy, can we take front?*"

Tommy should answer. The others were getting worried.

With steady, robotic motions, he pried his hand out of his mouth and crawled out of the cabinet. Technoblade helped him to his feet. Tommy should tell him he didn't need help. The words lodged in his chest.

Technoblade's gaze trailed to his hand. "You hurt yourself."

Tommy belatedly recognized the coppery taste on his lips. He'd bitten through his skin in an effort to muffle himself.

The piglin hybrid huffed, tugging him forward. "C'mere. It doesn't look bad enough for a potion, but we still gotta wash it off and bandage it."

Tommy obediently allowed Technoblade to steer him to the kitchen and wash away the blood. The piglin hybrid kept up a low stream of murmuring throughout, chattering away about plans for building a dog pen. Tommy didn't feel like listening. He let the words wash over him and fade into the static.

"*Tommy,*" someone called through the fog.

"*We can't reach him,*" someone else said. "*He's checking out. Just take over. It'll be worse if nobody's up front.*"

"*But Tommy--*"

"*I'll follow him and make sure he doesn't sink too deep. Go.*"

Tommy closed his eyes and sank into the nothingness.

Technoblade tied the bandage with a huff of satisfaction. “There. It should be healed in a couple days. Don’t do anythin’ crazy until then.”

“Okay,” Tommy mumbled. Relief lightened Technoblade’s shoulders. Talking was a good sign.

Except it wasn’t Tommy talking, which Technoblade realized as soon as he looked up. The voice was doing a decent job of faking exhaustion, but the minute twitching of their uninjured hand gave them away. This was the angry one, then - better at imitating Tommy than the other two, but not as good at hiding his emotional responses as the cold one.

The fact that they were here was. . . concerning. Tommy had retreated into the safety of his mind - a response that spoke *volumes* about how terrified he was. Technoblade still didn't know what Dream had done to him, but if this episode was any indication, he had to keep them as far apart as possible.

“You look tired,” he said. “Why don’t you go take a nap?”

The voice hesitated, waffling between releasing the frustration burning in their veins and keeping in character. At last, they grunted out an affirmative and shuffled off towards Tommy’s bedroom. Technoblade waited until he could no longer hear their footsteps, then slumped against the counter and scrubbed a hand down his face.

“Well, Chat,” he muttered. “We’ve really got our work cut out for us.”

E, said Chat. *Technosoft*.

“Thanks, Chat. Really helpful.”

Tommy opened his eyes.

A pair of boots stood about a foot from his nose. They were well-worn but finely crafted, the shape of the gleaming netherite strangely familiar. He stared at them, tracing the blades of grass that curled around the arches.

“Tommy,” said a voice above him.

Oh. He was lying on the ground. Tommy tried to remember how he’d gotten there.

“Come on, Tommy,” the man sighed. “Don’t be lazy. Get up.”

He pushed himself to his knees and slowly raised his gaze. Dazed confusion melted into horror when he saw the jagged smile cut into Dream's mask. "Wh-wha. . ." he stammered, glancing around. Slowly, his memories filed back in. "You. . . you hit me."

"What? No, you tripped."

*Tommy shook his head. Agony shot through his skull at the movement, reminding him of the prominent bruise forming on his temple. "You-- you fuckin' **knocked me out**, man--"*

Dream tilted his head, and Tommy knew he'd fucked up. "Are you calling me a liar, Tommy?"

Tommy scrambled backwards, only to find that he had nowhere to go. A glance backwards revealed that they were in Logstedshire.

"I--I," he stammered as the wooden walls rose around them. "Yes-- no, I don't-- don't--"

*Dream stalked forward. The dying light splattered across his hands as he reached out and hoisted Tommy up by the front of his shirt. Fingers closed around his throat. Tommy choked, reaching up to claw at them but Dream's grip was like iron and it **hurt--***

*There were shears in his hands. Tommy didn't know where they'd come from, but they were **there** and Dream was looming over him so he gathered the last of his strength, lifted them, and **pushed**. He felt flesh give way beneath the dull blades, heard the sickening **squelch** and the howl of primal agony, felt the bloodied hands that scrabbled at his arms and face and gouged out strips of flesh. The man staggered back but Tommy held on, falling with him, because if he let go he would die.*

*He held on until the body stopped squirming. Then he held on for a little longer to make sure it was really dead. Only when he was **certain** did he finally pry his blood-congealed fingers off the shear handles, collapse to the floor beside the corpse, and throw up.*

*His face was hot with tears, his throat **burned** in tandem with his stomach but he just couldn't stop retching, hunched over his ruined hands as he sobbed and sobbed and **sobbed** and why was he like this? The monster was dead, the monster was **gone** but it still hurt and nobody was coming because nobody knew he was **here**.*

Nobody was coming. And that meant Tommy had all the time in the world to howl and scream through his bloodied teeth, to let the guttural sobs tear themselves from his chest. He didn't need to pretend anymore, because the only person in the world who could take advantage of his show of emotion was lying dead two feet away.

*When he'd finally cried himself out, he was. . . numb. Not the **cold-silent-static** numb he'd sunk into between sessions, but a pleasant numbness like a pool on a hot summer day. It was actually pretty nice. He felt. . . calm, almost, the jagged edges of his shattered psyche smoothed over. It was a temporary fix at best, but Tommy could work with that.*

He tried to push himself to his feet, made it to his elbows and found he couldn't get much further. So he began the arduous process of dragging himself to the corpse instead, ignoring

how the rough obsidian scraped at his skin.

The green cloak was now a blood-spattered dress shirt. Tommy couldn't tell whether the blood was his or Quackity's. It didn't matter anyway. He was only focused on the keyring hanging from Quackity's belt. The bastard had taken to hanging them there as a taunt, a reminder of how helpless Tommy was. Joke's on him, because he just made Tommy's life easier.

Then Tommy caught a flash of bloodied metal in the corner of his eye. His false calm shuddered dangerously, but he clamped down on it, yanking it down over his volatile emotions. He could do this. He'd already seen much worse. He just had to-- reach out, yes, like that, and pry those keys off of Quackity's belt.

His hands were about an inch from the keyring when he snatched them back like he'd been burned. Had Quackity's hand moved? No, it couldn't be. Quackity couldn't move. He was dead. Tommy killed him.

*Almost unwillingly, Tommy's gaze slid to the left. Up towards Quackity's face. And **oh**, was that a mistake. He wrenched himself away, dry heaving as bile burned in his throat. He didn't have time for this. He had to pull himself together. This was his chance to escape. He had to get out.*

Squeezing his eye shut, he ripped the keyring away as fast as he could. With a sharp inhale, he steeled himself and tried to get to his knees again.

No dice. The moment he pushed himself up, his arms crumpled beneath him. He settled for inching his way to the door, gasping with the effort. Upon reaching it, he propped himself up against the wall and reached as far up as he could with his shaking hands. Thanking whatever deity was up there that Quackity hadn't been that tall, he shoved the keys into place.

Actually twisting them in the lock was another battle in itself- his bloody hands kept slipping off the metal. At last, the lock clicked open. Tommy pawed at the doorknob, heart thudding. For the first time since he'd woken up in this box, he felt almost hopeful.

The door swung open. Tommy recoiled as light burned into his retinas, searing his eyes.

Great. Three months of no light, and now he couldn't see. Just when he thought getting out of here couldn't get any harder. He squinted, but it was no use. Even the miniscule sliver of vision he was limited to made his eyes water. To be fair, he'd been kept in almost complete darkness whenever Quackity wasn't there, so the deterioration was to be expected. Still, this was a major setback.

Plan B, then.

He rose up on his elbows and, with quite some difficulty and a bit of thrashing, managed to pivot himself around. He dragged himself back to Quackity's corpse. The man's communicator was (unfortunately) not immediately visible, and Tommy was left with the

unpleasant choice of either a) flipping the corpse over to see if the comm was clipped to the back of Quackity's belt, or b) rifling through his pockets.

Both would require extended contact. But one required far less strength than the other.

With a shuddering breath, he wormed one hand into Quackity's trouser pocket. He almost wept in relief as his fingers brushed cold metal. Without further ado, he yanked the device out, flipping it open with shaking hands.

Who did he contact? He instantly crossed off anyone with a connection to Las Nevadas - he didn't know if they knew what Quackity had been doing to him, and though he was pretty sure they didn't, it was better to be safe than sorry. Scrolling through the list, he also crossed off those affiliated with the Eggpire. After the stunt he'd help pull at the Red Banquet, he wouldn't be surprised if they tried to finish what Quackity started.

That left very few options. The anarchists, the neutrals, or the other 'children' (not anymore) on the server. He didn't have any rapport to lean on with the anarchists, save for the time he'd teamed up with them - purely on business terms. He couldn't rely on Technoblade's hatred for Quackity, either - though killing Quackity would earn him a few brownie points, Technoblade valued loyalty above all else, and as a mercenary, Tommy would not be seen as trustworthy.

The neutrals. . . his strongest ally was Punz. Punz was also currently aligned with the Eggpire.

*That left only Tommy, Tubbo, and Ranboo. He hadn't talked to them in a long, **long** time, but hopefully there'd still be some lingering feeling of friendship. Before he could second-guess himself, he pressed the contact.*

Private Messaging: TommyInnit

<Quackity>: hhhelp

<Quackity>: 24.27904/-55.81590/1.20481

The reply was almost instantaneous.

Private Messaging: TommyInnit

<TommyInnit>: BIG Q???

<Quackity>: no

<Quackity>: purpl4ed

<Quackity>: *cnt movee*

<TommyInnit>: *shit shit shit*

<TommyInnit>: *hang on were coming*

Tommy let the comm clatter to the floor. He'd done all he needed to, and while every instinct was screaming at him to stay awake, the adrenaline rush had long worn off.

Pressing his face to the cool obsidian, he surrendered to the encroaching darkness.

Tommy awoke in complete darkness. He stared at the ceiling for a moment, trying to piece together how he'd gone to sleep in the first place.

Technoblade had agreed to train him. Dream had shown up. He'd hidden in a cabinet, and then-- oh shit, he'd fallen back without warning the others. He sat up, about to turn inwards to check on the others, only to be startled by a quiet voice.

"Welcome back."

Tommy flinched, knocking his elbow against the wall. "Purpled?" he hissed as he rubbed at the bruised limb. "Why're you awake?"

"I followed you down to make sure you didn't drift too far," Purpled answered. *"Got back around the same time you did. The other two must have put us to bed."*

". . . Oh." Tommy tugged at the bandages wrapped around his hand. "Uh. If you were, uh, sleeping at the same time as me. Was. . . uh. . . was it yours, then?"

"Was what mine?"

"Um. The. The, uh." Tommy mimed stabbing something.

Resignation settled behind their ribs. *"You saw."*

"Yeah," Tommy whispered. "I did. Did you. . . did you see the part with Dream?"

"Yeah."

". . . How much of that actually happened?"

"All of it." Purpled's voice was flat. *"Yours?"*

"Most of it. I didn't stab Dream, though." Tommy drew his knees up to his chest and let out a hoarse laugh. "We're both a little fucked up, aren't we?"

"Hmm," Purpled hummed.

They sat in silence for several long minutes, accompanied only by the ticking of the clock. Tommy had just begun considering returning to sleep when Purpled spoke. *"I killed Slimecicle."*

Tommy blinked at the non sequitur. "Uh. . . okay? Who's Slimecicle?"

"Quackity's friend. Or his pawn. I didn't care enough to figure it out. Either way, I killed him."

Tommy wasn't really sure where Purpled was going with this, but the guy was *finally* opening up. Least he could do was be an attentive listener. "Did he deserve it?"

Purpled's prolonged pause was answer enough. ". . . No," he admitted at last. *"But I was. . . angry. Quackity destroyed my UFO. I wanted to get back at him, but I couldn't find a way to hurt him - not the way he hurt me."* He laughed, soft and bitter. *"Fuck. I was so stupid. If I'd just let go of that stupid revenge plot--"*

He cut himself off. Tommy waited patiently as he regathered himself, fortifying the iron wall withholding his emotions.

". . . So. Yeah. I hurt Quackity. And Quackity. . . Quackity decided to hurt me back. He nabbed me right out of my base." Purpled's voice grew quieter. *"Nobody even noticed I was gone."*

Tommy swallowed the lump in his throat, painfully aware of the utter *blankness* Purpled was projecting. "Fuck, man, that's. . . I'm really sorry."

"It's over now," Purpled muttered. *"I got out. I got better. He didn't. End of story."*

It was not, in fact, end of story, but Tommy wasn't going to push. Instead, he thought back to the emotional conversation he'd had with Underscore a few weeks prior. "Do you, uh. . . want a hug?"

Purpled was quiet for a long moment. Tommy did his best not to fidget.

"A. . . hug, huh. It's been a long time since I've had one." He paused. *"Fuck it. Sure."*

Tommy stepped aside, allowing Purpled to slide into control beside him. He carefully raised their arms and wrapped them around themselves. Purpled hummed, sinking deeper into the warmth.

"You did this a lot in the future, too," he murmured. "Offered hugs. I never really understood how much I liked them until you were. . . well, until you were gone."

Tommy dithered for a moment, unsure of how to respond. He fell back on deflection. "What, are Underscore and Ran that shit at giving hugs?"

Purpled snorted. "No, they're just-- different." Wry humor twisted in their chest. "We were the closest in height, so."

A surprised cackle burst from Tommy's lips. "Is Underscore tiny in the future too?"

"Don't let him hear you say that. But, yes. Yes he is."

They fell into comfortable silence, simply enjoying the moment of peace. At length, Purpled unwrapped their arms and settled them in their lap.

"I've gotten a lot better in the past few years," he said. He rolled a loose string from the blanket between their fingers. "I had time to recover, time to heal. It's just. . . I'm not sure if I'll ever be how I was *before*."

"You're not."

Purpled stopped picking at the string. ". . . Huh?"

"You had a fuckin' *awful* experience, Purpled. That changes people. You're not gonna be the person you were ever again. But you don't have to be to be 'healed'. That's bullshit. You're gonna have bad days sometimes, and that's okay. Anyone who tells you otherwise is a dickhead."

"I--" Purpled stopped, unable to hide the surprise that sparked in their chest. ". . . I never thought about it that way."

Tommy shrugged, slightly embarrassed by the unexpectedly passionate speech. "Yeah, well. It's character development, innit?"

Purpled stared down at the blanket. Slowly, he retreated from the front, sinking back into the safety of their mindscape. Tommy didn't protest. He knew Purpled needed the time to think.

"*I'm. . . better now,*" he began at last. "*I-- the worst of it's over, I'm just. . . not at my best. Quackity-- he's **alive** now, and I know he hasn't even met Slime yet but--*"

"But as long as he's alive, he can hurt you."

". . . Yes."

"Well, he'll have to get through us first. You're not on your own anymore, Purpled. We've got your back."

Something warm and fuzzy glowed in their chest. ". . . *I can believe that. Thank you, Tommy.*"

Tommy floundered, not quite sure how to respond to such genuine gratitude. ". . . Uh. Yeah. You're. You're welcome." When Purpled emanated amusement in response, he flushed. "Go to sleep, purple bitch."

"*Night, child.*"

"Oi, you *take that back--*"

Technoblade wasn't too keen on going out after Dream's visit the day before, but he needed to stay on track with his plans. The hound army he was building - both in his pen and in the tunnels beneath L'Manberg - required constant maintenance. The longer he dawdled, the more time L'Manberg had to recollect itself and the greater the danger Philza was in. He'd just have to hope that Dream had enough common sense not to break into his house while he was gone.

Still, Technoblade found himself hesitating at the door. After a brief internal debate, he turned on his heel and headed towards the kitchen. A glance inside revealed Tommy hunched over the counter, scarfing down a sandwich with dogged determination. He appeared to already have recovered from Dream's visit, but. . . appearances could be deceiving.

Tommy paused mid-bite, apparently noticing Technoblade hovering in the doorway. "What?" he demanded, spraying crumbs all over his plate. "The fuck are you staring at me for?"

"I'm headin' out to hunt," Technoblade drawled. "Thought I'd let you know."

Something faltered in Tommy's expression, a slight widening of his eyes that belayed his anxiety. It was buried beneath mulish contempt before Technoblade could get a good look at it. "I know. You leave every day. Why are you telling me *now*?"

Oh, no. Answering that meant examining his own emotions regarding Tommy, which was *not* something he planned to do in the near future. ". . . Uh."

Tommy scoffed. "Look, if this is about Dream-- I'm not fuckin' fragile, okay? You don't need to pity me."

"I'm not," Technoblade said. Tommy narrowed his eyes. Their stare-down lasted for several long seconds, before Tommy huffed and looked away.

"Whatever," he muttered around his sandwich. "Go-- go kill some deer, or something."

Technoblade studied him for a moment, noting the tense set of his shoulders. Perhaps leaving Tommy alone in the house all day wasn't the best idea. Unable to train and with only the voices for company, the kid was bound to go a little stir-crazy - and when Tommy had nothing to distract himself with, he would either spiral into a trauma-induced mess or repress said trauma by causing *problems*. Not that he'd caused any yet, but Technoblade was chalking that up to the others keeping him in line. Still, it was only a matter of time before Technoblade came back to find his house on fire. He needed something to keep Tommy occupied.

Hmm. Maybe a friend would help?

“I thought you said you were hunting.”

“I did.”

Purpled looked at Technoblade, looked at the dog panting happily by their feet, then looked back at Technoblade. “That’s not food.”

“He can be if you want him to be.” Technoblade raised a hand to forestall any protest. “That was a joke. We’re not killin’ the dog.”

“Good,” Purpled said coolly. He crossed his arms and resisted the urge to look down at the cheerful ball of fluff that was now nosing at his ankles. “So why did you bring him home?”

“Well. You know how I was buildin’ a hound army. And, uh, this one was sittin’ by himself in the pen out back.” Technoblade cleared his throat. “He’s not exactly. . . *liked* by the other dogs, so I thought I’d ask if you wanted to. . . uh. . . keep him.”

“*Is. . .*” Underscore began, voice incredulous. “*Is he trying to give us a pet?*”

“*Technoblade has a heart,*” Tommy hissed. “*This is not a drill, the bastard has a heart--*”

Purpled ignored them. “Why don’t the other dogs like him?”

“Survival of the fittest. He can’t contribute much to their pack, so they abandoned him. He’s a bit of a runt, and, well. . .”

Technoblade crouched down and hoisted the puppy up. It wriggled in his grasp, all three of its legs kicking in the air. Purpled stared at the stub where a fourth should have been.

“*Oh,*” said Ran. “*That’s. . . Purpled, do you need us to switch out? Are you. . . are you okay?*”

“Yes,” Purpled said. Technoblade squinted at him.

“Yes, like ‘yes I want to keep the dog’, or--”

“Yes.”

“. . . Alright then. You want to hold him?”

At Purpled’s nod, Technoblade deposited the puppy in his arms. It stared up at Purpled, bright-eyed and friendly, then licked his nose. Purpled flinched back, surprised. The puppy tried to lick him again, but Purpled ducked back. He found himself smiling - a tiny smile, but genuine nonetheless.

“*Awww,*” Underscore cooed.

Ran inched forward, radiating sheepish eagerness. *"Can I hold him next?"*

"Get in line, Ranboob--"

"Wha-- Tommy, I asked first!"

"And I was in this body first, bitch."

"That's not--"

"--oh mimimi my name is boob boy and I don't respect human rights--"

"Behave," Purpled muttered under his breath. The quarreling voices fell silent.

". . . You hold him first, and I get to hold him later in our room," Ran bargained.

"Deal," Tommy chirped. Purpled snorted as he set the puppy down. It proceeded to climb back into his arms, forcing him to pick it up once again.

"He likes you," Technoblade said. Purpled glowered at him, as Tommy would have done. The man just snorted. "Nothin' to be ashamed of. Dogs are good judges of character."

Purpled rolled his eyes and slipped back, letting Tommy slide into control. The boy wasted no time in puffing up with righteous indignation. "What the fuck's that supposed to mean, bitch?!"

Wry amusement twisted the corners of Technoblade's lips as he raised his hands in mock surrender. "Nothin', Tommy. Why don't you give your dog a name?"

Tommy blinked down at the puppy. The puppy blinked back. "Uh. . . um. . ." He mentally prodded the other three, silently requesting suggestions.

"Argos," Ranboo suggested. At the flash of curiosity from the others, he elaborated. *"It's, uh, the name of a dog. Odysseus's dog. From the stories Techno told me."*

*"We're really going to name something inspired by **Technoblade**?"* The irritation in Underscore's voice, however, lacked any real bite. *"Really?"*

"I like it," was Purpled's input. That sealed the deal.

"Argos," Tommy said. Technoblade raised an eyebrow.

"Interestin' choice," he drawled. "Any connection to Homer?"

What the fuck was a homer? "Uh--"

"Yes," Ran replied, saving Tommy from an interrogation on his knowledge of mythology. He adjusted their hold on the puppy and smiled, full of genuine gratitude. ". . . Thanks, Techno. For the dog."

The edges of the man's countenance softened by the slightest degree. "Yeah, yeah. You're responsible for cleaning up after him, though. I'm not wiping the floor if he tracks mud into the house."

"I will!"

"Excuse me, Ranbitch, don't just make promises for us--"

Tommy's protests shattered when the animal in their arms turned his wide eyes up to him. "Fuck," he muttered. *"You're ganging up on me."*

Ran suppressed a snicker, then yelped when Argos licked his cheek. "Agh! No! No licking!" This only spurred the puppy on, and Ran was soon being full-on assaulted by the fluffy bundle. He dissolved into a bout of giggling, wiping dog drool from his face as Tommy shouted obscenities in their mind.

Standing forgotten to the side, Technoblade let out a fond huff and left them to it.

Chapter End Notes

Italicized section summary: Tommy's nightmare about being back in Logstedshire with Dream morphs into Purpled's nightmare about killing Quackity.

Extra:

Technoblade: No, I am not attached to Tommy. I agreed to train him because he'll owe me later. The puppy is a calculated strategic move. It'll distract Tommy and keep him from converting my house into cobblestone. Really, I don't care about him. He's just an ally of convenience.

Dream: *breathes*

Technoblade: I suddenly desire violence

words mend our brokenness

Chapter Summary

Important discussions are had, deals are made, and a new character joins the party.

Chapter Notes

Argo's name is officially being retconned to Argos, the name of Odysseus's dog because I like that idea better. Thanks to SugarSpice2022 for suggesting that :D
And no y'all I have no plans to kill him. I would never kill pets in front of you twice!
The audacity of such an accusation smh

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

*The other Tommy bared his teeth. Hatred was carved into his glower, and his eyes were jagged like chips of glass. When he spoke, pure **resentment** roiled in his voice. "The discs were worth more than you **ever** were."*

*Tommy went still, paralyzed by the sheer **shock** that coursed through his system. The agony hit a moment later, a terrible rampaging beast of **rage-grief-hurt** tearing him apart from the inside out. He tightened his grip on his sword, knuckles whitening, and opened his mouth to--*

Tommy bolted upright and blurted a loud "HOLY SHIT TUBBO I'M SO SORRY."

Then he realized where he was and slammed a hand over his mouth. Ten seconds ticked by in breathless silence. When no Technoblade barged into the bedroom to question the disturbance, Tommy carefully lowered his hands and slumped forward.

"Underscore?" He asked, turning his attention inwards. Ran and Purpled had slept through the commotion, but--

"*M here,*" Underscore murmured. He sounded subdued. "*Sorry you had to see that.*"

"Sorry *I* had to see that?" Tommy demanded, incredulous. "You had to fuckin' *live it!* What the *fuck* was up with future me?!"

"*He didn't mean it.*"

"Score, I *felt* what you felt. Him not meaning it doesn't mean *shit* if he hurts you. It's like-- when you chose me over L'Manberg, y'know?" He winced when Underscore's presence

spasmed in an approximation of a flinch. “No, Underscore, I’m not-- stop feelin’ guilty, dammit. I’m just trying to say that it’s-- it’s *wrong*, what I said, I don’t actually--”

“No, no, stop. I know you don’t--” Underscore paused for a moment, clearly gathering his thoughts. He sighed. *“You don’t have to apologize. You never said that to me.”*

“But I *will*,” Tommy argued.

“Then apologize to me when you do. Besides, future-you apologized a minute later.” Underscore’s tone shifted to something bordering on irritation. *“Stupid nightmare cut off before it showed you that part.”*

Tommy opened his mouth to reply, only to be distracted by a quiet huff. Something cold and wet touched his fingers. He barely stifled a shriek of surprise and recoiled, snatching his hand away as his head snapped in the direction of the offender.

A pair of puppy-dog eyes stared back, accompanied by another mournful whine and a shiver. Argos had been sleeping next to them. With Tommy’s sudden awakening, the blanket had been pulled away, exposing him to the chill of twilight air.

“Sorry, sorry,” Tommy muttered, gathering the pup up in his arms and wrapping the blanket around both of them. Argos pressed his tiny head against Tommy’s chest, leeching off of his body warmth. Slowly, his shiver subsided.

“Still, Underscore,” Tommy murmured, softer now. “S not right.”

“I know,” Underscore said. *“It’s okay now, though. Really. We figured it out. It’s in the past.”*

“I’m sorry.”

“Seriously, Tommy, it’s okay. I’ve forgiven future-you ten times over.”

“Still, I’m--”

“Shut up and pet the dog.”

Tommy shut up and pet the dog. He stayed there, curled around Argos, until the first rays of sunlight sliced through the window.

“Oof!”

“You almost hit me that time,” Technoblade drawled. He lowered his blunted sword and held out a hand. Underscore accepted it with a huff, allowing himself to be pulled to his feet.

“Again,” he demanded. The piglin hybrid shook his head.

“You’ve reached your limit for today. We’ll go back to sword forms tomorrow. Word of advice - stop underestimating how long your arms are. That’s gonna make you overbalance.”

Underscore stiffened, his joints locking up. He sent a sharp flash of panic at the others, painfully aware of how it was mirrored on his face. Technoblade, who had turned away to stow his sword in a chest, didn’t see it.

“Oh, he definitely knows,” Purpled muttered. They’d done their best to hide it, but adjusting to fighting in Tommy’s body was a whole different story from simply walking around. Purpled kept accidentally closing his ‘bad’ eye and expecting his left leg to be heavier; Underscore struggled with being too tall and Ran with being too short. Someone as observant as Technoblade would’ve definitely noticed their slip-ups. *“At this point, it’s just a question of how **much** .”*

Their burgeoning alarm was interrupted when Technoblade turned back around, a look of slight irritation on his face. “Take that off,” he said, jerking his chin towards Tommy’s iron armor. “Your body’s not ready to take that much weight for extended periods of time.”

“Of course, Techno,” Tommy snarked. He handed over his training sword and began working his chestplate off. “Whatever you say, Techno.”

“Thank you, gremlin,” Technoblade returned, perfectly deadpan. He took the remaining pieces of armor. “I’ll put this away. Go feed your dog. It’s almost time for lunch.”

Putting aside their worries about Technoblade, Tommy turned and headed for the stairs. “Who’s turn is it to feed Argos?” he murmured under his breath.

“Mine!” Ran walloped them all with a bright burst of *excitement-joy-love*, then yelped and shrunk in on himself. *“Oh-- oops, sorry, I-- didn’t mean to do that--”*

Tommy had reached the top of the stairs at this point. He reached for the doorknob and poked the voice with a bout of fond irritation. “Just shut up and feed the dog, Ranboob.”

“Right, right.” Ran hustled into front. Together with Tommy, he opened the door and hastened through it. A mere moment later, Argos was weaving around their ankles, barking and hopping and panting with excitement.

“Who’s a good boy?” Ran cooed, dropping down to their knees. Argos promptly went for their face, smothering them with slobbery kisses. Tommy drew back with a noise of disgust, leaving Ran alone at the front. “Ack-- no, Argos, down boy-- I have to feed you, come on!”

Argos subsided his display of affection with a happy bark. Ran wiped dog drool off of his face and headed for the kitchen, mindful of the puppy trailing at his heels. He retrieved a few strips of jerky from a chest and knelt down. Argos dashed up to him, so Ran ripped a piece of jerky off the larger strip and tossed it to him. The puppy snapped it right out of the air.

Slowly, Ran began widening the radius of his throws. Argos kept up with no problems, dashing back and forth with easy agility. Something in him *settled* at the sight, soothed by the simple joy of watching the three-legged pup.

“Give ‘im a whole piece,” Tommy said.

Ran obliged, tossing the last piece of jerky towards Argos without ripping it. The puppy pounced as soon as it hit the ground and engaged in a vicious struggle with his prey. Underscore and Purpled found themselves sending out simultaneous waves of *amusement-fondness-joy*, then set silent commands of *Do Not* upon Tommy when he shifted like he was about to make fun of them.

A movement in the doorway had them looking up. Technoblade was watching Argos, eyes half-lidded in his usual deadpan expression. He met Ran’s gaze. “You’re teachin’ him to play with his food,” he drawled.

Ran shrugged. “He’s having fun.”

“So I can see.” Technoblade turned his attention back to Argos. One corner of his lips tilted up as the puppy ripped apart the last chunk of jerky with a growl. “He’ll be a good hunter.”

“Mm.”

Argos froze midbite, ears perking up. A moment later, someone knocked on the door.

Tommy slammed into the driver’s seat, scrambling towards one of the empty cabinets lining the walls. Technoblade, meanwhile, scooped Argos up and deposited him in a makeshift pen enclosed by several chests. With the puppy secured and semi-concealed, he then spun on his heel and headed for the door.

Peering through the cracks between the hinges, Tommy saw him stop just short of opening the door. “Who’s there?” he called.

“**Techno?**” An odd, echoing voice sounded from the other side. “**Hello, it’s Ghostbur.**”

Technoblade’s shoulders sagged imperceptibly, then stiffened again. “Is there anyone with you?”

“**Yes!**”

A pause as Technoblade waited for Ghostbur to elaborate. He didn’t. The piglin hybrid sighed. “. . . And *who’s* with you?”

“O-oh, uh, it’s me. Ranboo.” Tommy startled when he heard the muffled voice, then hissed and rubbed the top of his head, which he’d hit against the roof of the cabinet. It was *weird* to hear Ran’s voice *outside* of his head.

“Is there anyone *else* with you?”

“N-no? Were you, uh, expecting someone?”

“In a way,” Technoblade grunted. He pulled the door open, revealing Ghostbur and Ranboo. “Why are you here?”

From this distance, Ranboo looked the same as he had when Tommy last saw him. All three voices, however, shuddered like someone had walked over their graves.

“Oooh,” Ran hissed. “*That’s weird.*”

Tommy elected to ignore them in favor of crawling out of the cabinet. He took a moment to stretch out his cramped limbs, then staggered into the living room. Neither of the visitors had noticed his presence yet, far more preoccupied with the more prominent threat.

Despite being a good deal shorter than the enderman hybrid, Technoblade was somehow *looming* over Ranboo. The man was fucking *terrifying*. “Yeah, well, if you’re visitin’ me, I’m gonna need my stuff back, Ranboo.”

Ranboo glanced nervously over his shoulder, as though he expected to find the rest of the L’Manberg cabinet staring disapprovingly at the traitorous exchange. “You can’t tell them I was the one who gave it to you.”

“Deal,” Technoblade agreed easily. He squinted at the enderman hybrid. “I’m gonna be honest, when I first vowed to get all my stuff back, I thought it was gonna be way harder than this, not gonna lie.”

“Yeah, uh, I’m a pushover--”

Tommy unceremoniously inserted himself into the conversation. “RANBOOB! GHOSTBUR!”

He wasn’t expecting Ranboo to flinch. The enderman hybrid’s eyes locked on Tommy’s, widened, then began tearing up. “Tommy? Y-you’re alive?”

Tommy blinked at Ranboo. “Uh. Yeah. Not dead, so. I’m fuckin’ *hard* to kill, Ranboo. Like a cockroach. A pog cockroach.”

“*You suck at flattering descriptions,*” Purpled said. Tommy sent a sharp jab of *irritation* his way.

“Ah,” Ranboo said weakly. He wiped at his eyes with his sleeve. “It’s just, uh. Tubbo, Tubbo said there, uh, was a tower. In Logstedshire. And everything was blown up.”

Tommy swallowed. “Oh. Yeah, um, I got in a bit of a tower-building mood. You know. Big man TommyInnit and his Towers of Power.” He forced out a laugh. It sounded flat even to his own ears. “Don’t worry, I got down safe.”

Ranboo didn’t look like he believed him, but a slight *shift* in Technoblade’s posture warned him from prodding further. “That’s, uh, that’s good. So you’re living with Technoblade now?”

“Yup.” Grasping desperately for an escape from the tense conversation, Tommy leaned to the side so he could make direct eye contact with Ghostbur. “Oi, Ghostbur!”

Ghostbur blinked at the address, then smiled. “**Hi, Tommy. How are you?**”

“Great. Absolutely *fucking* fan -*tastic*, Ghostbur.” Tommy’s grin had too many teeth to be happy. “Where the *fuck* have you been?!”

“Oh, around! You know, I just found Techno’s house last week--”

“Nonono, that’s not--” Tommy inhaled through his nose, drawing on the *calm-apologetic-calm* Ran was projecting. “Just-- where have you been, man? I had a party and you were meant to invite everyone and you didn’t invite anyone.”

“I told you, Dream--” Underscore began , only to cut himself off. *“Just-- hear him out.”*

“What party?” Technoblade rumbled.

Tommy’s shoulders hunched. “I had a beach party,” he muttered. “Wrote invites for everyone, gave ‘em to Ghostbur, and-- and nobody showed up. Dream said it was ‘cause nobody cared, but. . .”

Ghostbur clapped his hands, shattering the heavy silence. **“I did send out the invites! Or, I was sending them, but then Dream interrupted me. He told me to stop, and he said not to worry and he asked me for the invitations. And, I, uh, gave him the invitations. He said he’d do the rest.”**

“Of course,” Ran muttered.

“And then he told me to go for a walk in the snow. So I did! And then I got lost for a while, but it’s okay because I found Technoblade. He let me in and he protected me from the rain ‘cause it was melting me.”

Tommy glanced over at Technoblade, who snorted. “Yeah, he showed up when the Butcher Army was tryin’ to capture me. Literally at the worst possible moment. And then he stood over there and talked to the army and was like ‘OH HEY TECHNOBLADE!’ And waved at me, and all four of the guys in the army turned and *made eye contact with me*, and then I got executed. Direct consequence.”

Ranboo winced. “Look, I’m really sorry about that--”

“Why are you even here?!”

“I-I was just following Ghostbur!”

“You tried to kill me!”

“That was mostly the other three!”

Tommy interrupted their conversation before it could escalate. “Wait, wait. Ghostbur. Dream- - Dream took the invitations?”

“Yeah! And I think he might’ve told me you didn’t want to see me anymore, but I’m not sure.” Blue dripped from Ghostbur’s fingers. **“... The memory’s a bit fuzzy.”**

“Oh,” Tommy said. “Oh. He. He did?”

“*I told you,*” Underscore murmured, “*he didn’t forget you. He loves you.*”

Tommy took a step back. His head was spinning. “I . . . but . . . Dream-- he’s-- he’s not--”

“What’s wrong with Dream?”

“Nothing!” Tommy blurted. The responding lash of *irritation* from the three voices had him grimacing. “Or-- er-- I don’t-- there’s-- he’s my *friend* but-- I fucking *hate him* -- I don’t--”

“Tommy.” Technoblade’s hand settled on his shoulder. “Calm. Breathe.”

“I am perfectly calm, you asshole,” Tommy snapped. The world was starting to blur. “I am-- *so fucking calm--*”

“*Let me,*” Purpled said. Tommy slid aside in implied consent, allowing Purpled to slot into front alongside him. The voice wasted no time in clamping down on their lungs, forcibly evening out their breaths. Tommy closed their eyes and tried to focus on the grounding weight of Technoblade’s hand.

When it no longer seemed as though they were about to pass out, Purpled retreated. Tommy just *stood* there for a moment, trying to find his balance. At last, he took a deep breath and opened his eyes. “Techno.”

The piglin hybrid carefully lifted his hand from Tommy’s shoulder. “. . . Tommy. You good now?”

“Mm.” Tommy let his gaze drift to the side, staring at the wood grains of the doorframe in lieu of the others’ expressions. “Hey Techno, you remember our deal?”

“. . . Yes?”

“I’ll side with you on one condition.”

Tommy could practically *feel* Technoblade’s gaze sharpen. “Oh?”

“I want my discs back.”

Surprise, hot and bright, burst open in his chest. “*What?*” Underscore and Ran asked in unison. Purpled remained silent. Tommy sent back a feeble sense of surety, an unspoken promise to explain later.

“You. . . want your discs back,” Technoblade echoed, letting the syllables roll off his tongue as though he was tasting the words. “. . . Why?”

Because one of them was in Dream’s hands. Because as long as Dream had it, Tommy knew Dream could hurt him. Because the other was in Tubbo’s hands, and Tommy was only supposed to give the discs to his friends. Because Dream was his friend. Or wasn’t his friend. It was really confusing.

"I want them back," he said. Explaining the symbolism of the discs was far beyond his mental fortitude at the moment. Technoblade must have recognized it, because he just sighed and tilted his head.

"We can talk about it later." *When our guests are gone*, was the unspoken statement.

Unfortunately, Ghostbur was inept at reading the situation. **"But why do you care so much about the discs in the first place? What's so good about the discs?"**

Tommy scowled. "It's-- it's what started everything, innit? I can't sleep easy knowing fuckin' *Dream* of all people has 'em. I have to get them back."

Ghostbur frowned. **"I . . . don't understand,"** he admitted. **"They're just music discs, aren't they?"**

"But they have sen-ti-men-tal value," Tommy muttered. He couldn't quite swallow the venom that laced his next words. "You wouldn't get it, Ghostbur."

"But. . . don't people have more sentimental value?"

Tommy went cold. The hair along his arms rose, leaving a trail of prickling goosebumps behind. "I-I'm not valuing them over people," he protested, but his voice felt weak in the face of Ghostbur's perplexed stare. His own voice, twisted with hatred, echoed in his mind. *The discs were worth more--*

Underscore drowned his *guilt-grief-fear* with a bucketload of *determination*. *"I know you don't care more for the discs than us, Tommy. Stop feeling guilty. You didn't say those things, and my Tommy apologized."*

Tommy huffed, his shoulders slumping. "Look," he said, both to Ghostbur and to the voices. "If it comes down to it, I'll choose people over the discs. Always, you hear me? People over the discs."

Ghostbur studied him for a moment, his eerie gaze drifting over his features. At last, he smiled. **"That's-- that's good to hear, Tommy! I'm sorry if I offended you! Silly me, of course you'd value people over your discs!"** He giggled, tapping his cheek in playful thought. **"Do you remember, when you gave them up for L'Manberg? Alivebur was really happy."**

Tommy frowned. Something about that rubbed him the wrong way. He hadn't given his discs to Dream for L'Manberg, the *nation* - he'd given them up for L'Manberg, the *people*. His friends had been so excited about making their own nation, and he didn't want to watch that *joy* drain from their eyes. So he'd gone to Dream with an ultimatum, and. . . the rest was history.

But Ghostbur wouldn't understand any of that. Trying to explain it to him would be a fool's errand. So Tommy just sighed and nodded. "Yeah, Ghostbur. I know."

The ghost beamed and made as though to reply. Tommy braced himself for another inane spiel, only for Technoblade to cut into the conversation. “Look, that’s great and all, but seriously. Why are you guys here?” When Ranboo opened his mouth to repeat the *I-just-happened-to-follow-Ghostbur* excuse, Technoblade held up a hand. “No, no, I mean-- what are you goin’ to *do* here?”

Ranboo perked up. “Oh! Uh, well, um, you see. I.” He reached into his inventory, pulled out a journal, flipped through a few pages, and made a face. “. . . I don’t know. I’m not going to do anything, though.”

“You don’t know,” Technoblade deadpanned.

“I . . . think I might’ve been at Logstedshire. Looking for, uh, clues.” Ranboo made a face. “Then I ran into Ghostbur, and I followed him, so--” He gestured down at himself. Abruptly, his eyes brightened. “Oh yeah! Tommy, I have-- I have something for you!”

Tommy stared down at the flowerpot Ranboo handed him. The plant it housed was crowned with a flourish of purple petals and a vibrant green stem. “. . . Huh?”

Ranboo flushed. “Um, it’s another allium. For you. I-it was going to be for your m-memorial, but, um, since you’re here and-- *alive* , I might as well just.” He gestured at the flowerpot.

“*Oh,*” Ran said. “*I gave it early this time.*”

Tommy swallowed. His fingertips bleached white as he tightened his grip on the rough ceramic. He’d been far too distracted by the voices and *Dream* to really think about Ranboo, but-- faced with him now, all he could feel was *resentment*. The empty letter-chest flashed before his eyes, taunting him.

Months of loneliness and self-hatred, nights spend screaming up at the cold, unfeeling stars and *begging* for someone to reach out to him. Near-obsessive trips to the letter chest to check it, only to find it empty, empty, empty again because Ranboo had only written to him out of *pity*-- and now he got a *flower* as some kind of shitty apology? Like some pathetic *plant* could make up for the hurt of being *abandoned*?

He was speaking before he even realized it, spitting words laced with venom. “Really? A *pity flower*?”

The voices flinched in unison, surprised by the shift in his mood. Ranboo blinked. “A pi--? no, Tommy, this isn’t--”

“You do a lot of shit out of pity, Ranboo. Visit me out of pity. Send me letters out of pity.” Tommy puffed up, a veneer of righteous indignation hiding the frisson of *betrayal-hurt-loneliness* running through him. “You-- you even gave me a pickaxe out of pity! A pity pickaxe!”

“Wh-- no, Tommy--”

Tommy was too worked up to acknowledge the comment. “And then you just *stopped* sending me letters, man! What the fuck was up with that?”

Ranboo frowned. “. . . Tommy, I was sending you letters the entire time.”

“Yeah? Then why weren’t they in the chest?”

“Th-they were there. I sent you letters. I’m sure, I know I wrote it down in my book--”

“Well, they weren’t in the letter chest!”

“It was in the letter chest. I don’t know what keeps happening to it. I don’t know who would--” Ranboo’s eyes darted to the side. “. . . Well, I probably do know who would do it, but. Sending you letters, giving you stuff-- I didn’t do it out of pity. Nothing I ever did for you was out of pity, Tommy. I swear. It-- it was out of a debt.

“In the courtroom, you stood up for me when you could’ve easily pinned all of it on me. But you didn’t. And then I could’ve been exiled, I could’ve been the only one being exiled-- but then you decided to take the full blame instead. So. . . I did that because I felt like we were in it together, and you were the only one that got punished, so the least I could do was help you out just a little bit. It wasn’t out of pity. I didn’t care about that. I cared about what you did for me in the beginning.” Ranboo’s voice softened. “I care about *you*. ”

Tommy blinked, overwhelmed by the genuineness of the declaration. “. . . Oh,” he said dumbly, unable to formulate a proper response. “That’s. . . oh.”

“Dream took the letters,” Ran said, inexplicably guilty . *“I’m sorry, I never realized-- I forgot that you thought I pitied you. Dream told me-- well, he told **everyone** that you didn’t want any more visitors. He started enforcing the travel ban a lot more strictly, too. In the last few weeks, I couldn’t get in the portal. So.”*

So Ranboo stopped visiting or leaving letters, and Tommy was left thinking he’d been abandoned by yet another friend. All as a result of Dream’s machinations.

“I am going to punch his teeth out,” Underscore said.

“Get in line,” Purpled deadpanned. *“There’s a lot of people out there who’d pay good money to do the same.”*

Tommy turned his attention away from the peanut gallery to see that Ranboo had twisted his fingers up in agitation. Technoblade was eyeing him oddly, and Ghostbur’s smile had waned. Shit. He’d been quiet for too long. “Uh. I. Th-thanks. For. The flower. And the letters. I’m. Sorry I yelled.” When Ranboo’s lips quirked up in the start of a smile, he hastily added, “But you’re still a bitch. Bitch.”

Ranboo’s smile strained but remained in place. “It’s okay, Tommy.”

Technoblade cleared his throat. “So this is heartwarmin’ and all, but I’d really like my stuff back now. And for you all to preferably get out of my doorway. And off my property in general.”

Ranboo startled like a spooked cat. “O-oh! Right-- yeah, sorry-- here--”

He pulled a veritable *pile* of armor and weaponry from his inventory and dumped it into Technoblade’s hands. The piglin hybrid raised a judgmental eyebrow at the gracelessness of the action, but began sorting them into his inventory without comment.

Awkward silence descended on their little gathering. Ghostbur was gazing at an unknown point somewhere over Tommy’s shoulder. Tommy himself took to staring intently at his new floral companion, trying to decide where to place it. Ranboo began fidgeting as the silence stretched on, clearly uncomfortable. Just as the tension grew too heavy to bear, Technoblade sighed and stowed away the last of his sharp, pointy belongings.

“Don’t you have somewhere to be?” he asked Ranboo. “Nobody’s gonna notice you’re gone?”

“O-oh. Uh.” Ranboo’s tail lashed from side to side. “Maybe?”

“Then you might wanna get goin’.”

“R-right.” Ranboo glanced at Tommy. “Tommy, I . . . I’m assuming you want to stay here?”

Tommy hadn’t even *thought* about returning to L’Manberg. “Yeah,” he said stiffly.

Ranboo nodded jerkily. “Okay. That’s. Um. I won’t tell anyone where you are. Or that you’re alive, I guess. I-it’s your choice, but if you do change your mind or--”

Technoblade cleared his throat pointedly, cutting through Ranboo’s rambling. The enderman hybrid flushed. “I’m glad you’re alive,” he blurted. “If you need anything just let me know and I’ll try to help, okay? Okay. Bye.”

Before Tommy could even react to that, he was scurrying down the steps and away to the forest.

“Nervous one, isn’t he,” Technoblade deadpanned. He turned to Ghostbur. “Well. Now that that guy’s gone-- you want to come in, Ghostbur?”

“**. . . No,**” Ghostbur murmured. His hands were almost entirely stained blue by now, and the substance was leaving a sizable puddle on Technoblade’s front porch. The piglin hybrid wrinkled his nose at it. **“I need to look for Friend, I think. I’m not quite sure where he went, and that’s. . . I need Friend.”**

Tommy swallowed, watching as the ghost’s eyes glazed over. “Ghostbur,” he called. When Ghostbur’s hazy gaze turned to him, he continued, “Thanks. For. For caring. I’m sorry for doubting you.”

Ghostbur’s brow crinkled with confusion, only to smooth over a moment later. **“You have nothing to be sorry for, Tommy. I . . . what were we talking about again?”**

Tommy winced. Technoblade stepped in, voice surprisingly gentle. “How about you go look for. . . Friend, Ghostbur? I’m sure he’s waitin’ for you.”

Ghostbur nodded dazedly, then swiveled around and drifted off. Technoblade ushered Tommy away from the entrance and swung the door shut.

All was silent. Tommy closed his eyes, took a moment to *breathe*, focused on the textured surface of the flowerpot in his hands--

“So you said something about our deal?”

Tommy grimaced, set his shoulders, and turned to face Technoblade. “I . . . I’ll help you. With your fight against L’Manberg. But only if you help me get my discs back.”

The voices shifted uneasily, and Tommy knew he wasn’t imagining the waves of *trepidation* that lapped against his ribcage. Still, they remained silent. A sign of trust.

“You’ll help me fight,” Technoblade said. “And in exchange, I get your discs for you from-- who has it now?”

“Tubbo and Dream each have one.” Tommy hesitated. “I-- I just want the disc from Dream. Not Tubbo. Tubbo can keep it.”

Technoblade studied him. Tommy scowled at him and tried not to shift under his gaze.

“. . . Deal,” Technoblade said. “I’ll get the disc back from Dream, and you’ll help me with my dogs.”

Tommy blinked. “Dogs?”

“Yeah. You know the hound army out back?”

“Yeah?”

“Well, I’m, uh, building another one beneath L’Manberg. It’s growing pretty fast, and it’s been hard feeding them all by myself.”

“*Oh, that **bastard**,*” Underscore hissed. “*So that’s where all the dogs came from!*”

Tommy shook his head. “Wait-- what about-- I dunno, TNT? Or potions? Or w-wither skulls?”

“I already have more than enough TNT and wither skulls,” Technoblade drawled. “And I don’t trust your potion-brewin’ skills. You’d probably ruin my stands.”

“What about the fighting?!”

“What *about* the fightin’?”

Tommy spluttered. “I-- you-- you want me to help with *just* the dogs?!”

Technoblade snorted. “Listen, kid. If you can hold your own against me for ten minutes, I’ll let you join the fight. Otherwise, stay out of it. I’m a one-man army. I don’t need you gettin’

in the way.”

Tommy bristled, but his seething indignation was doused by Purpled’s words. *“He’s giving us an out. We don’t have to fight, we just have to help him prepare.”*

“Oh,” Underscore said. *“OH. That’s. Huh. What the fuck?”*

“It’s why I trusted him so much,” Ran said. *“He did a lot of bad stuff, I know he did, but-- he was **kind** .”*

Technoblade held out a hand. “So. You help me with the dogs, and I help you get your disc from Dream. We’ve got a deal?”

Tommy reached out and took it. “Yeah. We’ve got a deal.”

The moment his bedroom door closed behind him, Underscore rounded on him. *“Tommy, what are you doing?! Why are-- you’re going to help Technoblade destroy L’Manberg?”*

Tommy winced. “No matter what I do, he’s still gonna destroy L’Manberg. I’m just-- speeding things up. Techno promised he wouldn’t permakill anyone, and I just. . . I want my discs back. I love L’Manberg, but. . . it’s not about the people anymore. It’s not the place Wilbur and I wanted it to be. Dream’s pretty much in control now, and the presidency isn’t doing any good for Tubbo, and-- well.” He hesitated, then shuffled over to his bed and sank down on it. “. . . What happened in your timeline?”

There was a pause. When it became clear that Underscore wasn’t going to speak, Ran took over. “. . . Technoblade, Philza, and-- and Dream blew L’Manberg up with a TNT grid. And withers. Um. J-Jack was the only one who lost a canon life, I. . . think, but. . . L’Manberg was turned into a crater. A bedrock-level crater. And, uh, it. . . it exposed the Crimson. Which. Is a pretty big problem.”

“Not if we get to it before it starts spreading,” Purpled said. *“It’s better this way, actually. We don’t have to spend time looking for it.”* When the other three let out unrestrained bursts of horror-indignation-anger, he added, *“Not that I want L’Manberg to be destroyed, but-- if we can’t stop it. . .”*

“We might as well take advantage of it,” Underscore finished.

They sat there in grim silence, contemplating the ramifications of the path they were choosing. Echoes of *trepidation-fear-worry* pinged off the corners of the mindscape. But just as the sun’s rays began to turn golden, they were pulled from their thoughts by a low whine outside of their door. Technoblade must have released Argos from his makeshift pen.

Ran sighed. *“You know what? I vote we stop thinking about this and hug Argos.”*

“*Seconded.*”

“*That sounds awesome.*”

“. . . Okay,” Tommy agreed. Grateful for the distraction from the churning in his stomach, he rose and went to let Argos in.

“Why can’t I go with you?!”

“You know,” Technoblade drawled, “When you said you’d help me, I thought you’d be a lot less. . . enthusiastic about it.”

“Shut the fuck up.”

“I don’t think I will, actually.”

“Fuck you. Answer the fucking question, you bastard. Why won’t you let me come? I said I’d help you with the dog army, so fucking *let me!*”

Technoblade set his jaw and stared up at the ceiling. Finally, he released a heavy sigh. “It’s not safe.”

“You-- you literally said you wanted me to help with the hounds in L’Manberg! And I can fight! You’ve been teaching me!”

“Tommy--”

“*No*, Technoblade, *you listen to me*. I am fucking *sick and tired* of being stuck in this cabin all the time and the snow and the shitty forest and the stupid mountains and for fuck’s sake, I just want to see *my home* again!”

That last admission rang in the air between them. Tommy realized his unintended vulnerability a second too late and drew in on himself, trying to scrape together some semblance of dignity. “Uh. A-and your house is ugly.”

Technoblade stared at him, eyes just a little too wide for him to affect an expression of neutrality. After a long moment of silence, his brows lowered and he turned his gaze to the floor. “Look, Tommy,” he began hesitantly. “I. . . I get it. You miss the mainland. It’s just, uh.” His jaw pulled back in a grimace. “You know. Dream’s on the mainland.”

Oh.

Right. Dream.

“*He’s trying to protect us,*” Ran said. “*Keep us from running into Dream.*”

Tommy wanted to protest that he *didn't need protecting*, but the memory of his last near-miss with Dream had his palms going clammy. "Oh," he croaked. "Right. *Him*."

Technoblade shrugged apologetically, but there was something sharp-edged and *dark* roiling in his eyes. "There are hidin' places in this house. The mainland's a bit more. . . exposed, and, uh, I don't think you want the green teletubby to see you."

"Green teletubby--?!" Underscore blurted, his incredulity all but driving him to the forefront. He withdrew when he realized that he'd spoken aloud. "*Oh shit, sorry--*"

Tommy was too busy snickering to really care. Technoblade snorted, but his usual deadpan was betrayed by how the edges of his lips quirked up. "I said what I said."

"*He definitely has the teletubby vibes,*" Ran offered. "*It's the soulless eyes.*"

Purpled directed a general sense of *incredulousness* in his direction. "*Did you just say 'vibes' unironically?*"

". . . *Do you have a problem with that?*"

"*Vibes is a good word,*" Underscore chimed in. "*Good vibes.*"

"*Stop.*"

"*Someone needs a vibe check!*"

"*Don't.*"

"*C'mon, Purpleeeeee--*"

Tommy checked back into the real world to find Technoblade reaching out for him. Any humor he felt disappeared in a wash of cold *terror*; stunning the voices into silence. He flinched back, raising his hands to fend off a blow that. . . never came.

"Tommy. Tommy, can you hear me?"

Tommy peeled one eye open to see that Technoblade had backed up several paces and lowered his arms to his sides. His hands were open, palms facing Tommy.

"I'm not goin' to hit you," the piglin hybrid said. "I was just goin' to touch your shoulder. You weren't respondin'."

Tommy sucked in air through his teeth and settled stiffly back into what could be generously called a neutral position. ". . . Oh."

Technoblade's frown grew more pronounced. "Are you. . . good? You were kinda just smilin' at nothin'."

Tommy swallowed. His mouth was dry. "I was laughing 'cause your face looked stupid."

Technoblade stared at him for several tense seconds, face unreadable. Finally, his shoulders slumped and he sighed. “Look. About-- helping me. You can, uh, take care of the army out back. And Carl. And *fine*, you can make potions if you want - I’ll need a lot of invisibility, and I can show you where I keep my potion ingredients. Just-- don’t go to the mainland. It’s a lot more likely that you’ll run into Dream there.”

Unfortunately, he made a valid point. Tommy begrudgingly swallowed his wounded pride. “Fine,” he muttered. “I’ll stay here. *Fine* .”

Technoblade nodded awkwardly. “Glad we’re in agreement. I’ll, uh, I’ll show you my storage system. Follow me.”

He turned and made for the ladder. Tommy leaned into the other voices, took a fortifying breath, and followed.

Three days into the new deal with Technoblade, Tommy discovered a new way to keep himself entertained.

“-- *you’ll* be Sir Poggington the Second, *you’ll* be Fredericks--”

Ran sounded close to tears. “*Stop giving the dogs terrible names!*”

“*I think they’re nice!*”

“*Underscore, your definition of ‘nice’ includes nuclear weaponry--*”

“*Your point?*”

“‘Terrible’ is subjective,” Tommy sniffed. He pointed at one of the puppies, who blinked innocently up at him. “And *you’ll* be Porkalicious. Junior. Which dog’s your parent? We need a Porkalicious Sr. too.”

“*Whyyyyy*,” Ran wailed.

“*You named your cat Jjjjjjeffrey*,” Purpled deadpanned. “*You have no leg to stand on.*”

There was a moment of silence.

“*. . . That pun wasn’t intentional.*”

A voice floated over from one of the windows. Seemed like Technoblade was home.

“Tommy! Come here! There’s somethin’ we need to talk about!”

Tommy huffed, rising from where he’d been petting Porkalicious Jr. The paw-trampled snow crunched beneath his feet as he turned to survey the rest of the dog pen. Most of the hounds

were finishing off the remnants of the meal Tommy had brought or lazing around with half-closed eyes, made drowsy by their full bellies. Their fur shone gold in the light of the setting sun. Tommy was tempted to curl up in the snow beside them. The dogs were simple. They liked him. They were willing to welcome him to their cuddle piles. They never asked him uncomfortable questions or suspected that he had three other people living in his head.

“Tommy!”

“You should probably answer him.”

Tommy rolled his eyes. “FOR FUCK’S SAKE, I’M COMING,” he hollered as he waded over to the gate and shut it behind him. Grumbling, he stalked around the side of the house and slammed the front door open. “What the fuck do you want.”

Technoblade raised an eyebrow at him and moved back, a clear invitation to enter. Tommy did so, but very consciously chose to not shake the snow from his boots before he stepped onto Technoblade’s (formerly) nice, clean floor.

“I was in the middle of something important, you know. Very important.”

Technoblade snorted. “I’m sure. Anyway. Tommy, our livin’ arrangement’s gonna have to change a bit.”

Tommy took a moment to process that. Then his heart plunged into his stomach. “Wha--?”

Technoblade stepped aside, revealing a familiar man. Ran made a punched-out noise deep in their mind and *surged* forward, drowning the others in a flurry of *grief-guilt-relief*. Tommy hastily relinquished half of the metaphorical driver’s seat, knowing how *much* Ran wanted to *feel*. To remind himself that this was real.

“Phil defected from L’Manberg. He’s goin’ to be stayin’ with us now.”

Chapter End Notes

Agghhhhhh the long dialogue scenes are. Not the best. but I’d never get them published if I tried to fix them so I gave up on that. Sorry D:

I am taking many liberties with canon and canon portrayals to fit this narrative so pls don’t come after me for not sticking to accurate lore

Green Festival + the first big reveal coming up in the next chapter! Thank you all so much for your patience!

even our best-laid plans

Chapter Summary

Preparations for the green festival. Tommy receives a gift.

PART 1/2 OF A DOUBLE UPDATE

Chapter Notes

April Fools! I WROTE TWO CHAPTERS INSTEAD OF ONE MWAHAHAHA
(sorry the green festival is in the next chapter, not this one. Brainrot took over)

PSA: What Philza says is *purely conjecture, and not based in any scientific evidence*. DO NOT use this fic as a source of information about DID. Tommy's situation is *not supposed to be a representation of DID, and should not be treated as such*.

This PSA was brought to you by the fact that apparently some people think faking DID is 'cool' nowadays, and base their expectations on fics like these. It's not cool. Don't do it.

TW: Referenced Abuse, Referenced c!Dream

Ran's voice was quiet, choked by a mixture of grief and hope. "Ph-Philza?"

Philza smiled at them, his eyes crinkling. "Hey, mate. Good to see you."

A strangled sob rose in their throat. Ran *wrenched* himself back and fled into the mindscape, locking down his emotional turmoil before it could cause them to physically tear up.

"Oh," Tommy said, desperately fumbling to reorient himself. "H-hi. Uh. 'Ow do?"

"Good, good." Philza bobbed his head in a motion reminiscent of a crow. "Just snuck out of L'Manberg after breaking house arrest, still coming down from the adrenaline rush. How are you, Tommy? It's been a while, hasn't it? Haven't seen you since. . ."

Since you got exiled.

The grin Tommy mustered up was mostly genuine. He counted that as a win. "I'm good, big man. It's. . . good seeing you again."

Philza beamed and not-so-subtly nudged Technoblade. “How about you, Tech? How have things been going for you?”

The piglin hybrid leveled him with a flat look. “Phil, you know small talk’s not my strong suit.”

“Aw, you just have to practice--”

“*Anyway*,” Technoblade spoke over the avian, “We have more important things to talk about. Besides Phil, I mean. Phil’s going to be here now for the foreseeable future. Is that gonna be a problem?”

Tommy swallowed, painfully aware of the dryness in his mouth. “. . . Philza Minecraft is the only man ever,” he joked weakly, and tried not to imagine Philza picking out every little thing wrong with him. Technoblade had been more than happy to maintain a professional relationship and not ask questions, but Philza and his crow-father instincts were an entirely different case. “I am honored by his presence.”

Philza snorted. Technoblade rolled his eyes, but his lips quirked up briefly before settling back into a grim line. “Right. Onto the second thing then. Apparently there’s this party that’s about to happen on the Mainland in a few days.” Technoblade glanced at Philza, who nodded in confirmation. “Another festival, apparently. Dunno what’s up with L’Manberg and festivals, but it’ll be a good opportunity for sneakin’ around. Word-of-mouth says that Dream’s goin’ to be there, so it’ll be a good chance to look for his base - or even confront him directly.”

Underscore and Ran jerked simultaneously, their mental walls cracking under the weight of sudden *surprise-horror-fear*. Tommy flinched.

“Tommy?” Philza asked. “Is something wrong?”

“I-- n-no,” Tommy managed to squeak, pawing blindly at Underscore and Ran. The two seemed to realize what they were doing and hastily reinforced their walls, cutting off the deluge of emotions.

“*The second L’Manberg festival’s-- what you dreamed about a while back*,” Underscore said. “*With, uh, with the discs and the screaming match. We’ll explain more when we’re alone.*”

“*It’s not something we can avoid*,” Ran added. “*It’s a major turning point in everything that happens. Everyone’s going to be there. If you could find some way to broker peace, or at least warn people about the Crimson. . .*”

In other words, it was an opportunity he couldn’t pass up. He’d have to go to the mainland, a mere few days after he’d agreed to stay away from it to avoid Dream.

Underscore winced. “*I’m sorry. We didn’t realize it was so soon.*”

Tommy steeled himself and blinked back into the present, only to flinch back when he came face to face with Philza. The man took a step back, a concerned wrinkle forming in his brow.

“You alright, mate?”

Tommy swallowed. “Oh, uh. Sorry. I was thinking.”

“Don’t strain yourself,” Technoblade deadpanned.

Tommy flipped him off, but he was too distracted by the information to really escalate into his usual insults. “About the festival-- I should go.”

Technoblade’s brow crinkled. “Tommy--”

“I know! I know, *fuck*, I know. But I-- I gotta face Dream eventually. If I don’t go out, he might come to this house while you’re gone and-- and hunt me down. He’s already visited once. It’s better if I meet him on my own terms, with people at my back. Yeah.”

Philza’s smile dimmed as he looked between the two of them. “What’s this about Dream?”

Neither Technoblade nor Tommy replied, too busy locked in a staredown.

“Let me.”

Tommy sidestepped and felt Purpled slot into place beside him. “I’ve been doing well,” the former mercenary pointed out. “I can fight if it comes down to it, and I know you didn’t want me on the Mainland because we might run into Dream, but he won’t try anything with so many people.”

“We talked about this,” Technoblade said. “You said you didn’t want to go to the Mainland.”

The words came off accusatory, but Purpled smoothed over the edges of Tommy’s flaring indignation and kept their voice level. “Yeah, well, I changed my mind.”

Technoblade’s lips thinned. “Look, Tommy. I get it. But last time Dream visited. . .” *It didn’t go well* went unsaid.

“We might not even run into him. You said Dream’s at the party, right? So as long as we avoid it--”

“But if we have to confront him directly? Can you-- can you handle that?”

“It’s Dream,” Philza cut in, his feathers fluttering with wry amusement. “You never know if he’ll show up or not - he’s an enigma. But Techno-- you do realize Tommy will sneak out and follow us if we try to leave him behind.”

Tommy puffed out his chest. “Yeah, bitch! And you can’t stop me!”

“I think I can, actually,” Technoblade deadpanned. He was clearly unconvinced.

Tommy was alarmed when Purpled allowed a thread of *trepidation-hope-caution* to slip through his iron defenses. “*Purpled?*” Underscore asked. “*Is that a warning? It feels like a warning. What are you doing?*”

Purpled didn't answer. Instead, he moved further forward, crowding Tommy out. Tommy was too confused to resist, and thus too late to stop Purpled from looking Technoblade directly in the eye and saying, *"We can handle it."*

There was a moment of tense silence. Then:

"Did you just--"

"Oh--"

"What the FUCK, Purpled!" Tommy wrenched control back and tried very hard not to start hyperventilating on the spot. He had barely enough cognizance not to start cursing aloud, but it was a close thing.

"There wasn't any other way to convince him," Purpled said apologetically. *"He already knew we were here. He had to. We weren't being subtle about it."*

"You can't just--" Underscore spluttered for all three of them, at a loss for words. *"What about Philza?!"*

"You think Technoblade won't tell him all about us the moment we leave the room? And Philza's not stupid, either. He'd see through us before long, this was just throwing him a clue."

"That doesn't mean you can--"

"It's the only way Technoblade would let us go to the Green Festival," Purpled insisted. *"I'm sorry, but we didn't have any other choice. It's fine. He's not going to do anything."*

Tommy's attention snapped to Technoblade. Indeed, the piglin hybrid's shuttered expression had shifted to contemplation. Philza was still watching them both with a somewhat bemused smile, but there was now an inquisitive tilt to his head that made Tommy shudder.

"You're sure you can handle it," Technoblade said. *"If you run into Dream, you won't freeze up?"*

Tommy curled his fingers. Uncurled them. Tried to breathe past the *rage-terror-fear* roiling in his gut and met Technoblade's gaze.

"Yes," he gritted out. *"I can."*

Technoblade studied him for another moment, then nodded sharply. *"Fine. Fine, you'll come with us. We can start plannin' how we're goin' to do this tomorrow."*

"Tomorrow?"

"We've all had a difficult night," Technoblade deadpanned. *"And I'd prefer to have you reconsider your decision to come with us after eight hours of sleep. For the record, I think you comin' to the mainland is a terrible idea."*

“Fuck off,” Tommy grumbled. Knowing he was basically heading towards a meeting with Dream of his own free will. . . winning the argument didn’t feel like a victory.

Philza glanced between the two of them. His face was now carefully blank, which meant he was even more suspicious than before. Wonderful. Amazing. Fucking *fantastic*.

Tommy closed his eyes and breathed through the urge to scream. “I’m going to bed,” he said shortly.

Technoblade frowned. “You haven’t eaten dinner.”

“M not hungry,” *and I have a fuckton of things I need to discuss with the voices in my head.* “Just tired. Busy day, did big man things, you know. I’m gonna-- I’m gonna go sleep now. Yeah. Night Phil. Nice seeing you again.”

He fled the room before either Technoblade or Philza could protest.

The moment Philza had seen Tommy, he’d noted that there was something *off* about him. It wasn’t just the new scars or the lingering malnourishment - it was in the way he carried himself, the way he spoke, the way he looked out at the world with eyes that didn’t quite seem to fit on his face. When their gazes had first met, Tommy had looked about a second away from bursting into tears - only for that expression to morph into dazed confusion. When he’d argued with Technoblade, there had been a strange cadence to his speech that made Philza’s wings prickle with a sense of *wrongwrongwrong*. And then there was the way Tommy had put an odd emphasis on “*we*”. Philza had the strangest feeling that he wasn’t referring to himself and Technoblade.

Still, he couldn’t quite pin down the cause of the oddities, and was thus forced to contend with an instinctive uneasiness that he couldn’t justify. So he smiled and nodded through the conversation, bid Tommy goodnight, and waited until he was definitively out of earshot before he turned to Technoblade. “Techno. What the fuck is up with Tommy?”

Technoblade huffed. “That was fast.” At the *look* Philza sent him, he sighed. “I have. . . a theory. But you’re not gonna like it.”

“Tell me.”

Technoblade gestured towards the couches. “You might wanna sit down. It’s a. . . difficult topic.”

Philza narrowed his eyes but reluctantly obliged, shuffling over to the couches and settling down. Technoblade joined him a moment later, sinking heavily onto the other end as though he was carrying a great weight across his shoulders.

“Alright. So. Exile.” Technoblade blew out a heavy breath and clasped his hands together, staring into the fireplace. “Whatever happened there was. . . bad. Real bad. I’m pretty sure Dream did-- did *something* to Tommy that made him. . . Hm. It’s hard to explain-- I thought it was voices at first, because he was talking to himself, but then-- then he started actin’ like four people in the same body.” When Philza furrowed his brow, he gestured. “It’s-- it’s like that mental condition I read about a few years back, where someone goes through a traumatic experience and. . . becomes different people to protect themselves? I don’t remember the name--”

Philza snapped his fingers. “Dissociative Identity Disorder?”

“Yeah. That.” Technoblade grimaced. “It’s just-- some of Tommy’s behavior doesn’t completely-- *match* what I read about. He has dissociative episodes, but they’re - not common? Which is a *good* thing but-- yeah. Or maybe those times when he gets lost in thought are disassociation episodes, I don’t know. His switches are. . . really fluid, too. No confusion, no spacing out - He can swap out between one sentence and the next, and sometimes I don’t even notice I’m talkin’ to someone else. And-- he never showed any sign of it in Pogtopia. I thought it could only develop in-- it early childhood.”

Philza hummed. “It might be possible. There’s. . . still a lot we don’t understand about DID. It’s possible he just has some differences from the ‘norm’ - which is the case for many mental health conditions. The common symptoms won’t apply to everyone.”

Something in Technoblade’s expression darkened. “So he might really have. . .”

“Yeah.”

They sat in silence for a minute, accompanied only by their tumultuous thoughts and the crackling of the fire. When Technoblade finally spoke, his voice was eerily flat. “I’m goin’ to kill Dream.”

“Might not have been him,” Philza pointed out halfheartedly.

“You didn’t see how Tommy reacted when he came to visit, Phil. It was-- it was bad. Really bad. He just-- stopped talkin’. Didn’t even realize he’d hurt himself. One of the others took over and tried to pretend they were him, but-- it was pretty obvious.”

The avian had no response to that. So they sat in silence, staring into the fireplace as the minutes ticked by.

At last, Philza huffed out a harsh breath and jerked to his feet. “Well. It’s been a long day, so I’m going to head to bed. D’you have a room I can sleep in, or. . .?”

“Upstairs. Second door to the left. The first door’s Tommy’s, so be careful.”

“Got it. Night, Techno.”

“Night, old man.”

Philza retreated to the bedroom in silence, leaving Technoblade alone before the fire. Neither of them slept well that night.

Tommy awoke with a puppy on his chest and exhaustion in his bones.

Which was par for the course when one stayed up late into the night conversing with the voices in one's head. In the course of a few hours, they'd gone over the play-by-play of what had happened at the festival in the future, tried to figure out how to fix it, come up with no solutions, and ended up creating a list of goals to reach as a basic guideline for what to do when the time came.

He considered the dog snoozing on his ribs for a moment, then carefully lifted him off and sat up. Argos awoke with a disgruntled snort, and proceeded to wriggle around until Tommy set him down on his lap. Leaning back into the headboard, Tommy absentmindedly began running his fingers through Argos's fur as he prodded at the voices. They roused slowly, equally as sluggish after a long night.

"*Wha. . .*" if Ran still had a body, Tommy was pretty sure he would have yawned then. "*Oh. Huh. Good morning.*"

"Morning," Tommy said, the other two voices echoing the sentiment with varying degrees of wakefulness. A sudden movement from Argos, however, drew their attention downward. The puppy crawled across Tommy's legs and over to a journal lying on the bedspread, which it then proceeded to attempt to bite for some godforsaken reason. Sometimes, Tommy wished he knew what went on in Argos's skull--

Wait a minute. That was his *journal*. The journal that contained The List of goals he'd written last night, and which was now getting spotted with dog drool.

"Oh shit," he said, reaching over and yanking the notebook away. Argos yelped as his new toy was snatched from him. "Argos-- *no*, bad. This isn't food-- Argos, *stop*."

The puppy stopped trying to climb up Tommy to reach the notebook with a disgruntled huff, then insistently shoved his head under Tommy's free hand in a demand for pets. Tommy obliged with a fond roll of his eyes.

"*Is the list okay?*" Underscore asked.

Tommy fumbled the book open with one hand and squinted at the paper. His scrawl was more illegible than usual, having been twisted by lack of sleep and anxiety-driven adrenaline. Thankfully, the cover appeared to have taken the brunt of Argos's wrath, so The List was only slightly wet around the edges.

As for the contents of The List, they were rather simple:

1. Prevent Tubbo from giving his disc to Dream
 1. If possible, get the second disc back from Dream?
2. NOT betray Technoblade, because he's a powerful ally and they need him on their side to protect themselves from Dream
3. Warning people away from the Egg (if an opportunity arises)
4. Not die

"Ah, yes, 'not die'," Purpled said, drier than a desert biome. "That sounds like a great idea. I'm sure it won't be difficult at all."

"Shut up," Tommy grumbled, tearing The List out of his journal and folding it up. He tucked it into his inventory and tossed the rest of the notebook onto the desk across the room, where Argos would have no chance of getting it. It slid to a stop beside the potted allium Ranboo had given him. "Look, this is-- this is pretty simple, right? We just gotta make sure to *not* join L'Manberg, and keep the second disc out of Dream's hands. Easy enough."

Even Argos gave him a dubious look. Tommy scowled at him, then immediately felt bad and apologized via more pets. The puppy accepted said pets with much happy panting and tail wagging.

"Mainly, we need Technoblade on our side," Ran said. "Last time, he teamed up with Dream because-- well, because Tommy chose to go back to L'Manberg."

"He might still team up with Dream if Dream cashes in the favor," Underscore muttered.

Tommy went rigid. Argos nudged his hand in protest at the disappearance of the petting. "Wait. Favor? What favor?"

Both the presences of Underscore and Ran spasmed in a mental approximation of a flinch. Purpled groaned. *"I knew we forgot something."*

Underscore shifted nervously. *"You. . . remember how we told you about the, uh, the Butcher Army? You know? Technoblade's execution? And how he used a totem of undying?"*

"Yeah. . .?"

"Right. Uhhh. You see, Dream was the one who helped him get that totem, apparently. And also gave him an escape route. So he owes Dream a favor."

Tommy closed his eyes and breathed. In for four, hold for seven, out for eight, just like Purpled had taught him. When he no longer felt dangerously close to panicking, he turned a glare upon the wall. "You didn't think to mention this *before*?"

"I'm sorry." Underscore sounded miserable. "It just slipped my mind-- he used it for something else in the future, so I didn't even think--"

"Technoblade won't turn us in for the favor," Purpled said.

There was a moment of surprised silence at the confidence with which he'd declared that. "You-- you can't know that," Underscore protested.

“Dream mentioned the favor when he visited.”

Tommy inhaled sharply. “What? He did?”

“The three of you were too. . . distracted to hear it, but Dream said Technoblade owed him. Technoblade’s response was. . .” Purpled hesitated. *“Look, at the very least, if Dream demands that he hands us over, he’ll try to find a loophole around it. He **does** care about you, that much is obvious, and. . . from what I can tell, Technoblade protects his own.”*

“He does,” Ran agreed. *“He-- he really does.”*

“What, so we just fuckin’ *forget* that Dream has a favor hanging over Techno’s head?”

“No,” Purpled said. *“That would be stupid. I’m just saying - Technoblade’s loyal to us as long as we’re loyal to him. We can use that. He’ll protect us from Dream.”*

Tommy dug his nails into his palms. Argos whined unhappily and nosed insistently at Tommy’s hands. With a deep breath, Tommy pried his fingers open and brushed them through Argos’s fur. This time, the puppy remained fairly docile, still save for the steady *thump-thump-thump* of his tail against the covers. Tommy focused on the texture of the soft bristles, letting it ground him.

When he no longer felt like the world was seconds away from being yanked out from under him, Tommy scooped Argos up and slid off the bed. The puppy *whuffed* in his ear as he padded over to the door and slipped it open. Cautiously, Tommy poked his head into the hallway. As expected, the door to the guest bedroom was ajar. Faint voices floated from the floor below. Philza and Technoblade were both already awake, then. And they were likely waiting on Tommy.

“Well,” Underscore said unenthusiastically, *“we might as well get this over with.”*

Tommy steeled himself, tightened his grip on Argos, and stepped out of his bedroom. It was time to face the music.

“Good morning, m-- what is that?”

“His name is Argos,” Tommy said, “and if you hurt him I will kill you.”

Philza’s eyes softened. “I didn’t know you had a puppy.”

“Yeah?” Defensiveness reared its ugly head. “What’s it to you, bitch?”

“Tommy,” Technoblade said. Tommy grumbled under his breath and shuffled over to the table, where Technoblade was stabbing spoons into three bowls of oatmeal. The piglin hybrid jerked his chin towards Argos. “No paws on the table.”

“I know, I know.” Tommy squatted and carefully set Argos down. The puppy stumbled as he adjusted to being on solid ground, then let out a little bark and trotted over to one of the chests against the kitchen wall.

“We haven’t fed him breakfast yet,” Ran said. *“Whose turn is it?”*

“. . . Mine,” Underscore admitted. *“But I’m not sure if it’s a good idea to switch now when Phil is. . . right there.”*

Without thinking, Tommy turned to glance back at Philza - only to nearly jump out of his skin when he found him *looking back*. The man’s eyes widened with slight surprise, then creased in an awkward smile. Tommy turned sharply away, trying to obscure the flush crawling up his neck at being caught.

“It doesn’t matter,” Purpled said. *“We were already swapping around when we talked to him yesterday--”*

*“But that doesn’t mean we should do it **more**--”*

“--and Technoblade likely already knows we exist--”

*“--doesn’t mean we should make it obvious for **Phil**--”*

“Oh for fuck’s sake,” Tommy grumbled under his breath, and promptly yanked Underscore into the front. Underscore had enough control to strangle his yelp of surprise into a startled breath. *“We’ve been staring at the wall for half a minute. Just do it.”*

Underscore swallowed and retrieved a strip of jerky from the chest. Argos snatched it out of his hand, then spun about and nearly ran headfirst into Philza’s ankles. The avian chuckled and stepped out of the way, taking the bowl of oatmeal Technoblade slid across the table. “Thanks, mate.”

With Argos suitably distracted by his meal, Underscore settled back into the last empty seat at the dining table and surrendered control back to Tommy. Tommy promptly began shoveling oatmeal into his mouth in an attempt to ignore the tension in the air.

Philza kept glancing at him surreptitiously all throughout breakfast, brow furrowed with a mix of curiosity and worry. Tommy ground his teeth and did his best to ignore it, but each glance had his shoulder hiking a centimeter higher. Did Philza already have suspicions? Had he heard Tommy talking to himself through the bedroom walls last night? Did he *know*?

When Philza side-eyed him not-at-all-subtly for the third time in two minutes, Tommy slammed his spoon into his bowl and rounded on him. “What?” he demanded hotly. “You have something to fucking say to me?”

All movement at the table ceased. Philza paused with his spoon halfway to his mouth. Slowly, he set it down and frowned. “No. . .?”

“Then stop fucking looking at me,” Tommy snapped.

The avian had the decency to look sheepish. “Sorry. Didn’t mean to make you uncomfortable, mate. I was just-- hm.”

He turned away and began shoveling food into his mouth, staring intensely into his oatmeal as though it held the secrets of the universe. Tommy was pretty sure it was just oats and milk, though. Whatever. As long as Philza wasn’t staring at him with that *fucking* look on his face.

The rest of breakfast passed in uncomfortable silence, broken only when Technoblade set his spoon down, slid his empty bowl aside, and spread a map across the table. Tommy squinted at it. “The fuck is this?”

“Our route to L’Manberg,” Technoblade drawled. “Unfortunately, Ranboo didn’t have my compass to Phil’s house, just my armor. Which means we’ll have to go the long way around.” He traced the red ink snaking across the parchment, which delineated a route through a landscape that Tommy realized did not reflect the Overworld. “Also known as the Nether.”

Tommy scowled. Nether travel *sucked*, and after the whole exile thing, he had a few distinctly *unpleasant* memories associated with the dimension. “Does Phil not remember how he got here?”

Philza shook his head. “I was following a compass to Techno’s house. Would’ve been impossible to cross the ocean otherwise.”

. . . Right. The giant fucking body of water that separated this area from the Mainland and that made it nigh-impossible for Tommy to find the way back in the Overworld. But he didn’t want to go through the Nether either. If only they had a . . . compass. . .

“I’m a fuckin’ idiot,” Tommy muttered, fumbling for his inventory. At the *curiosity-alarm-worry* from the voices, he added, “I have a compass. To, uh, to Tubbo.”

He held the compass up. Technoblade held out a hand, but Tommy pulled back. His panic must have shown on his face, because the piglin hybrid faltered, then deliberately set his hand back down on the table.

“. . . Right,” Technoblade said, delicately smoothing over the exchange. He rolled the map up and returned it to his inventory. “This’ll be plan B, then.”

Then he pulled out a *second* map and slapped it down. Tommy recognized this one as a drawing of L’Manberg. He could feel Underscore’s *dismay-worry-irritation* at how Technoblade easily had had access to such information. “Where the fuck did you get a map of L’Manberg?”

“That one’s mine,” Philza said sheepishly. “I didn’t originally intend it for Techno, but, uh, if it’s being put to good use. . .”

Tommy swallowed the bitter tang of Ran’s *guilt-ambivalence-relief*. “Oh.”

Technoblade tapped a few ovals at the edge of the map. “There’s a few high vantage points here. If we can climb up, we should be able to see into L’Manberg-- get a look at what’s goin’

on.”

“And after we look?”

Technoblade shrugged, almost sheepishly. “We’re mostly just seeing if there’s an opportunity to get your discs back, or an opportunity to destroy L’Manberg.”

“So. . . the plan is that we have no plan?”

“We don’t have *that* precise of a plan,” Technoblade corrected. Tommy slanted a sideways look at Philza, who caught it and shrugged.

“No objections there, mate. I wasn’t really planning my escape from L’Manberg, either, and it turned out alright.”

Tommy bit back the *but this won’t turn out alright* that rose in his throat. It *would* turn out alright.

He’d make sure of it.

“Well,” Technoblade deadpanned, lifting the lid of a chest and peering at its contents. “Plan or no plan, we’ll definitely have enough invis potions to sneak around.”

“Hooooooly shit.” Philza opened another chest, revealing stacks upon stacks of potions. “How the fuck did you even have time to do this?”

“Tommy--”

“I made them out of the *kindness and generosity* of my heart,” Tommy sniffed. “I made so much invis that I can make it in my sleep. I’m the best at making invis now. Be in fear of me.”

“I’ve started brewing invis in my dreams,” Ran muttered. *“The process is pretty much imprinted onto the backs of our eyelids at this point.”*

“Yes, Tommy. Thank you.” Technoblade raised his hands and clapped slowly. “A true MVP here, everyone.”

“Damn right I am.”

“I was bein’ sar--” Technoblade deflated. “You know what? This isn’t worth it. I’m not fightin’ you about this.”

Philza burst into cackling. Tommy and Underscore joined in a moment later, accompanied by Ran’s sheepish amusement and the vague impression of a smirk from Purpled. Technoblade

looked up to the ceiling as though searching for the meaning of existence. He didn't find it.

Mercifully, Philza soon turned the topic back to the matter at hand. "So you'll just chug a bunch of invis pots and waltz around the party?"

"Sounds about right," Technoblade drawled, rolling his shoulders. "Do some sightseein', see what all the hype about *government* is."

Tommy turned to Philza. "You're not coming?"

Philza shook his head. "It's a stealth mission. The less people there are, the less likely you'll get caught. Besides, someone needs to stay back and hold down the fort, eh?"

Which was a fair point, given that Technoblade's cabin contained many valuables that the L'Manbergians or Dream would be all too happy to poke through. Tommy begrudgingly accepted this reasoning and returned to stocking his inventory with invisibility.

"Besides potions, we're goin' to need some armor," Technoblade muttered. "Better weapons, too. Not plannin' to fight anyone *yet*, but goin' unequipped is just *askin'* to get stabbed. Tommy."

Tommy started at the mention of his name. "Yeah?"

"Come here." When the teenager had warily shuffled over, Technoblade waved a hand. "Hold your arms out."

Tommy did so. Technoblade circled him, much like how he would during their training sessions. Tommy half-expected him to reach out and adjust his stance, but instead he just nodded sharply. "You should be able to handle heavier armor now," he murmured to himself. He stepped aside and swept a hand towards an armor stand that Tommy could've *sworn* hadn't been there yesterday. Had he moved it here last night? "Here. Try it on."

Tommy lifted the enchanted netherite chestplate from the stand, then nearly tripped when he overcompensated for the weight. It was much lighter than expected, and once he'd donned it, the armor fit perfectly, almost as if it had been made for him. Tommy tried moving around a bit, surprised by how easy it was.

"*Streamlined shape, lightweight,*" Underscore muttered. If he still had a physical body, he'd probably have pulled out a notebook and started scribbling in it. "*Dunno what enchantments he used on it - we'll have to examine that later. Still, the craftsmanship-- damn, Technoblade sure knows how to make armor.*"

"Is it too heavy? Too light? Does it fit?"

"Yeah," Tommy said. His chest felt tight. ". . . Yeah, it's perfect. Thanks."

Technoblade grunted and turned away, but there was a gleam in his eye that Tommy recognized as the Technoblade equivalent of a beaming grin. Ran began projecting *warm-happy-joyful*.

“What about weapons?” Philza asked, peering at him. “Did you not make *any* armor or tools while you were with Techno?”

“Didn’t have to,” Tommy mumbled. Didn’t really want to make anything high quality either, because if he borrowed Technoblade’s stuff and Dream caught him, he couldn’t destroy it without worrying about incurring Technoblade’s wrath. A foolproof plan, really, and even if the situation was improbable it made the *scared-run-hide* part of his brain settle somewhat.

“So you have no weapons?”

In answer, Tommy pulled out his iron sword. It had been with him since the first few days he’d spent with Technoblade. Philza cast a judgmental gaze on the chipped, rusting blade. “Yeah, mate, that’s not going to survive a battle.”

Tommy scowled at him, but couldn’t really refute the truth of the statement. “. . . Not like I have anything better,” he grumbled.

Technoblade cleared his throat. Tommy turned to him, wary, but the piglin hybrid met his gaze with strange solemnity. “I think you’re ready for this.” He reached into his inventory, rifled around for a bit, then pulled out a netherite axe and presented it to Tommy. “Here. Take this.”

“*Oh-- that’s--*” Ran shifted forward almost unconsciously, radiating *surprise-awe-warmth*. Tommy sidestepped so he could slot into place beside him. Together, they reached out and took the axe.

“. . . The Axe of Peace,” Ran breathed, running their fingers over the name engraved on the handle. Technoblade nodded gruffly.

“You’ve been workin’ hard in trainin’. Proved yourself worthy. Take good care of it.”

Ran opened and closed their mouth. Tommy didn’t say anything, giving him time to find the words. At last, Ran curled their fingers around the hilt and set their jaw. “Thank you,” he told Technoblade, who seemed taken aback by their earnestness.

“Uh. You’re welcome?”

Philza chuckled. “Don’t mind him, mate. He’s just bad at feelings. He knows you’re grateful.”

“Phil,” Technoblade complained. “You’re ruinin’ my image.”

“What image? Tommy already knows you’re a big softie.”

“*Phil--*”

Ran chuckled and slipped back, leaving Tommy with the Axe of Peace and no idea what to do with it. He’d normally start swinging it around willy-nilly and blustering about how powerful it was, but Ran’s reaction to it gave it an emotional weight that he couldn’t handle with his usual defensive callousness. He settled for sliding it into his inventory while Philza

and Technoblade bickered, all too aware of the bittersweet nostalgia Ran was projecting into the mindscape.

--and I've fought *gods*, old man--"

"I'm not *old*!"

"Uh-huh, uh-huh." Technoblade turned away, scooping a few more potions of invisibility into his inventory before slamming the chest shut. "Well. I'm all geared up. Tommy? You ready?"

"Wh--? Oh, yeah, uh." He took a quick glance at his inventory, then down at himself. "Yeah. I'm ready."

Technoblade jerked a head towards the ladder. "Good. Let's head out. Not sure Phil's blood pressure can handle more arguin' today."

Philza squawked. Technoblade ducked around the feathery wing that attempted to whack him and clambered up the ladder, chuffing good-naturedly all the while. Tommy hesitantly followed, slightly stunned by this new, friendlier side of Technoblade.

Argos followed them out the front door. It was a clear, sunny day, and the snow outside shone dazzling white. It was good weather for a party. Tommy breathed in the clean air and patted Argos's head, grinning as the puppy nipped at his fingers. "I'll be back soon," he told him. "Stay out of trouble until then, okay?"

"I'll take care of him," Philza promised. "Keep him fed and whatnot if you don't come back before sundown."

"Thanks." Tommy gave Argos one more pat and reluctantly straightened up, brushing fur from his fingers. As he stepped away, Argos tried to follow, but Philza scooped him up. The puppy barked, clearly displeased, but made little more than a token effort to wriggle free.

"Thanks for dog-sittin'," Technoblade said dryly. "And house-sittin'. I owe you one."

Philza raised an eyebrow. "Then stop calling me old man."

"Sorry Phil, I gotta speak the truth."

Philza rolled his eyes. "Get out of here," he told them, nudging Technoblade with his good wing. Technoblade obligingly strolled down the steps, stopping at the bottom and glancing back at Tommy.

"You comin'?"

Tommy quashed his nerves and nodded, striding down the stairs as well. The moment his boots touched the snow, he was struck with dizzying clarity. This was it. He was going to meet Dream today. He was going to meet Dream today and *change the course of the future*, and Prime damnit, he was going to *succeed*.

“GOOD LUCK!” Philza called. Tommy sent one last thumbs up over his shoulder, fixed his eyes on the horizon, and marched.

and the world knows us

Chapter Summary

The green festival, and all the revelations that come with it.

PART 2/2 OF A DOUBLE UPDATE

Chapter Notes

Sorry y'all looks like this is actually going into the double digits. UNDER 12 CHAPTERS THOUGH I PROMISE

TW: Major Character Death, Graphic Depictions Of Violence, Manipulation, Referenced Abuse, c!Dream

Tommy staggered onto solid ground, shaking out his sore muscles. His fingers were cramping from clutching the oars for so long. "Thank *fuck* that's over."

Technoblade smirked at him, perfectly dry despite having gone through the majority of the trip across the ocean via trident. Damn him and his ridiculously over-enchanted armor. "L."

"Shut the fuck up," Tommy snapped back. He straightened up and surveyed the shoreline, only to do a double take when his gaze landed on a strange building. "The fuck is tha--?"

"*Oh shit*," Underscore blurted, followed by a sharp spike of panic from Ran. "*Nonono, it's okay. Ran, it's okay. It's still unfinished.*"

"No idea," Technoblade was saying, seemingly oblivious to how Tommy had suddenly cut himself off. "Looks like a prison of some sort, though. It's got the guard towers and everything."

Tommy nodded distractedly, too preoccupied with shoving *inquiry-worry-fear* in the direction of the voices to pay him much mind. "*It's a prison*," Underscore said. "*Not relevant right now, but-- some of us have a bad history with it. Just-- just don't worry about it for now, if this works out we shouldn't have to--*"

"Tommy," Technoblade said, voice curling up at the end in the way that meant he'd noticed Tommy spacing out again. Shit. "Where are we headed?"

“Uh--” Tommy glanced down at his compass. “That way.”

“*Invisibility*,” Purpled reminded him.

“Fuck!” Tommy yelped, fumbling for his inventory. “I can’t-- *fuck*, I almost forgot about the invis-- here--”

He popped the cork of one bottle with one hand, and shoved another potion of invisibility in Technoblade’s direction with the other. Technoblade took it, eyebrow raised, and it was only then that Tommy realized Technoblade’s own inventory likely had more than a few stacks of invis. Thankfully, the invisibility was already taking effect, so Technoblade didn’t see the deep flush of embarrassment flooding his face.

“Lead the way,” Technoblade said. Tommy glowered down at the compass in his hand and rubbed a finger across the *Your Tubbo* engraved on the back. The needle pointed unerringly north, and so they followed.

Twenty minutes later found the two of them staring up at a tower. More specifically, the Power Tower Tommy had built so long ago.

“We need a vantage point, right?” Tommy craned his head, peering at the top of the structure. “We can climb this one. Get a look at what’s happening in L’Manberg.”

Technoblade hummed. “Seems a bit unsafe. How about that house over there? It has more footholds.”

Tommy narrowed his eyes at the aforementioned house near the edge of the L’Manberg border. “Are you calling my tower *unsafe*?”

“Nah, just sayin’ the structural integrity is questionable.” Technoblade’s voice emerged further ahead, forcing Tommy to storm after him or risk being left behind.

“Fuck him. He’s a bastard. The biggest bastard in existence,” he fumed. Ran snorted, but there was an edge of nervous relief to it that had Tommy frowning. Before he could inquire of it further, however, Technoblade called for him to hurry up. Tommy forgot about his questions in favor of scrambling up the wall and onto the roof.

“Techno?” he called, waving his arms about. Something smacked against his arm and he turned around with a yelp, only to get a faceful of invisibility particles.

“Look,” Technoblade grunted, nudging him forward. Tommy shuffled to the edge of the roof - and froze.

He could see Tubbo, Fundy, Quackity, and Ranboo. They looked tiny at this distance, shifting in and out of view as they moved through the central square of L’Manberg.

“I’m going to go investigate,” Technoblade said. “You stay here.”

Tommy was seized with a sudden panic. “Woah woah wait, you can’t just-- you can’t just leave me here!”

The wood beneath their feet creaked as Technoblade shifted. “It’s safer up here.”

“But-- but--”

A heavy sigh, followed by the rustling of cloth. “How about this.” A communicator popped into existence, seemingly floating in the air. “I’ll call you, and we can talk through this. If somethin’ happens, we’ll know. Does that sound acceptable?”

“... Yeah.”

“And crouch. They’ll be less likely to see the particles if you’re lower.”

Tommy lowered himself into a crouch, pressing one hand against the rooftop as his other fished for his communicator. “Okay.”

“Okay,” Technoblade parroted. The floating communicator wobbled briefly before Tommy’s own comm lit up with an incoming call. Tommy accepted it, then hastily cranked down the volume when Technoblade’s voice came crackling through. **“Does that work? Oh, it does. Nice. I’m headin’ down now. Don’t die while I’m gone.”**

With that, Technoblade blocked down from the roof. Tommy watched him go and leaned into the voices’ presence, reminding himself that he wasn’t completely alone in the middle of. . . well, it *was* technically enemy territory now. He could do this. He *had* to do this.

Taking a deep breath, he pushed himself up onto his elbows and peered down at L’Manberg. He could see his friends-- his *former* friends running around down below. From this distance, he couldn’t see their expressions. Were they laughing? Preparing for the festival? Talking about how they were so glad he wasn’t there to screw everything up?

“Whatever you’re thinking, stop,” Underscore said. “This was a ploy to kill Dream, remember? We’re not-- actually having fun without you or whatever you’re thinking.”

“I know,” Tommy muttered. “It’s just--”

“Sorry, did you say something?” came Technoblade’s voice from the communicator. Tommy very nearly dropped it off the roof in his fright, but managed to avoid doing so.

“What the *fuck* Techno--”

“Uhhh, sorry? I don’t know what I did but--”

“No, no.” Tommy took a deep breath. “Was just-- talking to myself.”

“... Okay.” There was a brief pause. **“I’m on the border now. By the path. There’s Ranboo, Fundy, Quackity, and... Tubbo. You said he had your disc, right?”**

“Yeah, but we don’t need to get it back from him.”

“You know, I feel like it wouldn’t be bad if we did--”

“But we don’t *need* to. Tubbo won’t do anything with it, but Dream-- Dream’s bad news.”

“Personally, I think Tubbo’s bad news too, but sure,” Technoblade grunted. “. . . Don’t think the party’s started yet. That or only the L’Manbergians are showing up, which is just sad. Would make it the saddest party this server has had. I mean, at least the other one had fireworrrrrrr. . . hm. Bad topic?”

Tommy let his silence speak for itself.

“Right. Uh, yeah, nobody else is here yet, just the L’Manberg people.”

Fifteen minutes ticked by in tense silence, punctuated only by Technoblade’s occasional updates (which, by minute ten, had generally devolved into **“Haven’t been spotted. No Dream, either. Ranboo did accidentally step on his tail, though, major L--”**). Just as Tommy had begun to wonder if they’d somehow already changed the course of the future, his communicator crackled.

“Uh, ” said Technoblade, in a tone that Tommy Did Not Like. **“That’s not good.”**

“What?”

“Dream’s here.”

“What?”

“You see the. . . the, uh, the wooden staircase?”

Tommy sat up and surveyed the landscape. His eyes landed on the aforementioned landmark. “Yeah, wha--”

Dream appeared from where he’d been partially concealed behind a large tree. Tommy’s voice died in his throat. All three voices shot forward, laying metaphorical fingers on the driver’s wheel but not taking control. Not yet.

The white disc of Dream’s mask panned from right to left, then back again as he scanned the horizon. Tommy pressed himself lower against the roof, painfully aware of the rapid *thud-thud-thud* of his heart throwing itself against his ribcage. Even when Dream’s gaze passed over him with incident, he remained wound tight. How long had it been since he’d drank an invisibility potion? Would the effect wear off soon? Would Dream somehow catch sight of the tiny communicator in his hand even across the distance and realize he was here? Would--

Dream pulled out a block of obsidian and placed it down. Then another block. And another block. And another. And then he began adding blocks on top of each other, like he was building--

“He’s buildin’ a wall around L’Manberg,” Technoblade said. “An obsidian wall.”

The voices had told Tommy it would happen. But *seeing* it was-- was--

*(“If you aren’t exiled, I’ll build these walls until they reach the block limit. I’ll keep everyone inside. I’ll hire guards - Punz and Sapnap to patrol all around the walls. No trade. No armor. No one leaves. They’ll get **slaughtered** inside.”)*

“Tommy, breathe,” Purpled reminded him. Tommy realized he’d forgotten to inhale, but the terror constricting his lungs made it almost impossible. “*Come on. In for four, hold for seven, out for eight. In for-- that’s it-- three four, hold two three four five six. . .*”

“What is this?!” Tubbo’s voice rose from below, laced with confusion and anger. Tommy’s next exhale punched out of him as the voice of his not-best-friend reached his ears. “What’s going on?!”

“Dream! What are you doing?!” Fundy.

“What the fuck--” Big Q.

The remnants of the L’Manberg cabinet converged on Dream. Dream rounded on them, all cold rage and sharp angles. “Tommy fucked up,” he snarled.

To his credit, Tubbo didn’t step back. Still, his voice came out frail and half-strangled by grief. “Wh-what?”

“You know what he did.”

“I-- no, we *don’t* know!” Tubbo’s voice rose, shrill with hysteria. “Tommy-- Tommy’s *dead*, what-- *why are you building walls?*”

“You don’t know?” Dream’s voice was flat with disbelief. “You really-- you *really* think I’ll believe that? You’re lying to me.”

“I’m *not*!”

Dream regarded the L’Manbergians in silence for what felt like a short eternity. Finally, he stepped off the obsidian wall and turned sharply on his heel. “Come with me,” he ordered.

Tubbo followed without hesitation. The other three shared glances but fell in line, reluctantly trailing after their president.

“That was close,” Technoblade said through the comm. Tommy jumped, then hissed as his unarmored elbow cracked against the unforgiving rooftop. **“Two feet to the right and Dream would’ve bumped into me. Anyway, I’m goin’ to follow them. Stay there--”**

“Fuck no,” Tommy retorted. Ignoring the stinging in his elbow, he pushed himself to his feet. “I need to be there. He says I’ve done something, I need to--”

“I can tell you what he says. Just stay there. It’s safer.”

“I can defend myself, bitch,” Tommy snapped. He slid off the roof and landed in a crouch. “I’m following them too. We stay together.”

“... **Alright**,” Technoblade reluctantly conceded. He ended the call.

Tommy sped up, scanning the area as he drew closer to the L'Manbergians. “Techno?” he whispered, turning his head this way and that. A glint of metal caught his eye, so he veered towards it. Sure enough, there was a floating communicator half-hidden behind a tree.

“Techno?” he whispered again.

“Quiet,” Technoblade hissed back as the communicator disappeared into his inventory. Tommy squinted in the direction of his voice, just barely managing to discern the cloud of Invisibility particles floating about. Even as he watched, it moved away, tailing the L'Manbergians and Dream but staying far enough away that it would be nigh impossible to notice. Tommy hastily followed.

“But-- but that's not--” Tubbo's voice grew clearer as Tommy drew closer. “Tommy-- Tommy's dead. I saw the tower. I *saw*. . .”

“Tommy *faked* his death for *attention*,” Dream spat. Tommy dug his fingernails into his palms and blinked against the tidal wave of white-hot *rage* that rushed through him. Up ahead, the group he was chasing crested a hill and disappeared over the other side - and yet the anger in Dream's voice remained clear. “He's not dead, he just ran back here to cause *more problems*. ”

“Wh. . . what?”

Dream laughed, cruel and bitter. “But you knew that, didn't you? You all had fun running circles around me, thinking I didn't know?”

“Wh-- no! What-- Dream, I don't-- we didn't know! We didn't lie to you!”

Fundy spoke quickly. “Listen, he's supposed to be exiled. He's not supposed to be around. . . here.”

Tommy grimaced, but Ranboo was already speaking over the fox hybrid. “Dream, this-- this doesn't make sense. You're lying again, aren't you? You're lying so you can put the wall up.”

Dream let out a single bark of laughter, cold and sharp as a blade through the throat. “Would I lie about *this*?”

Tommy sped up, sprinting up the last of the steps. And with that, he saw the Community House-- or what was left of it.

“Uhhhh,” went Tubbo, a sentiment reiterated with far more expletives by Quackity. “What. What?”

“It's all *gone*!” Fundy shrieked. “What?! How?!”

Tommy slunk closer, tensing as Dream's voice rang out once again. “You tell me.”

“Wait.” Tubbo turned to face him. “You-- you think *Tommy* did this?”

Dream's words took on the distinctly exasperated tone he used whenever he was admonishing Tomy for being stupid. "Tommy blew up the Community House, Tubbo. It's obvious. He faked his death for attention, and now that he's no longer getting it, he's back to causing problems."

"I don't-- understand." Tubbo sounded so lost. Tommy found himself shuffling forward once more, near- *trembling* with a mix of terror and his desire to interfere. He needed to-- he needed to step in, to stop this mess--

"*Behind you,*" Purpled snapped, grabbing control of their legs and leaping to the side. A moment later, Punz strolled past, decked out in full netherite and holding a trident. Bad followed him, similarly armored and armed.

The others had started arriving. The pieces were coming together.

"But he's not-- he's not supposed to be here!" Through the curtain of water, Tommy could see how Fundy was bristling. "He's exiled! This has nothing to do with us--"

"Nothing to do with you?" Tommy froze, heartrate rising in tandem with Dream's voice. "*Nothing to do with you?* You were supposed to control him! We were *this close* to peace! *THIS CLOSE!* I TRUSTED YOU GUYS FOR ONCE AND YOU *FUCKED IT UP!*"

The anger was familiar. Dangerous. Distantly, Tommy could hear Tubbo's protests. "We had nothing to do with this! Tommy has no affiliation with us--"

"You still have his *disc*, Tubbo! His most prized possession! You have it-- that makes you affiliated. If I don't have the disc, or he doesn't have the disc, then guess what? You. Are. Affiliated!" Tubbo stammered out objections, but Dream was having none of it. "This was the oldest building on the server! And he just *blew it up!*"

"He was supposed to stay away, Dream! He was exiled!"

"Yes, and he came back. You *knew* he came back!"

"We didn't--"

Dream held up a hand, effectively silencing the L'Manbergians. By now, a good chunk of the server had filtered into the Community House and were watching the confrontation with a mix of confusion and horrified fascination. "Listen. He has to pay for this. He can't just come and--" he swept an arm towards the water surrounding them. "*This is terrorism!* The Community House is the oldest building on the server-- a *major structure* of the Greater SMP-- and he just came and blew it up!"

Tubbo shook his head. "I don't-- Tommy wouldn't--"

Quackity stepped in as the president faltered. "Even if Tommy did this, why are we getting walled up? Why are you blaming *us?!?*"

"I already told you. Tubbo is the president, and Tubbo has the discs! You're affiliated!"

Ranboo tilted his head, his tail twitching nervously from side to side. “A-aren’t you supposed to be the one watching him, though?”

Tubbo straightened, relief clear in the set of his shoulders. “Right, you’re supposed to enforce his exile! I don’t see how this comes down on us--”

“How do I enforce his exile if I don’t have his discs?”

“Y-you have one of them, do you not?”

Dream’s head tilted in a manner that gave off the distinct impression that he was rolling his eyes. “I have *one*. I don’t have both. I need both.” When Tubbo hesitated, he huffed. “Listen, if you’re not affiliated with Tommy, then just give me the dumb discs. That’ll solve everything.”

Murmurs of agreement spread through the ruins of the Community House. Tommy’s heart sprang into his throat. He almost stormed in right then and there, but Ran’s *caution-wariness-warning* held him back.

Tubbo shook his head. “There must be another way. Surely. . . surely-- is there any other--”

“There isn’t another way, Tubbo. Just give it to me.”

“Is one not enough? Both of them are-- it just seems--”

Dream sighed. “Look, if you have one, he’ll always have faith he can just get it back because you’re affiliated. If you want nothing to do with Tommy, then *have nothing to do with him* . Don’t associate yourself by having one of the most prized possessions on the server. He just destroyed one of the most important buildings on the server, for fuck’s sake! Just give it to me!”

With trembling hands, Tubbo pulled Mellohi from his inventory. Dream’s lips peeled back in a victorious grin.

“*Go!*” Underscore shouted. Tommy rushed forward and plunged into the water. He heard Technoblade’s hiss for him to *stop-wait-don’t* and subsequent splashing in after him, and then he was stumbling out into the center of the Community House, coming face to face with his best friend and his worst enemy.

“Wait wait wait,” he spluttered, flicking water from his axe as he faded into the visible spectrum. “Don’t-- don’t give him the disc!”

Dream turned towards him. Tommy’s hands started shaking.

“*Breathe,*” Purpled reminded him. Tommy breathed. *In, two, three, four.* Dream’s stare burned into him. *Hold, two, three, four.* . .

“T-Tommy?” Tubbo’s voice was fragile, glassed over with hope. “You’re-- you’re alive?”

Tommy exhaled. He didn’t take his eyes off of Dream. “Hey, Tubbo. Long time no see.”

“Tommy,” Dream said. “What have you done?”

Tommy looked Dream in the eye, curled his trembling hands into fists, and summoned up every bit of righteous indignation he had left in him. “I didn’t do this!”

“Stop *lying*,” Dream snapped, and Tommy reeled back at the sudden burst of *rage*. The unpredictability was bringing back bad memories. “You’re always lying. Always hiding things from me. If you just behaved, we wouldn’t have to be here!”

“I didn’t blow this place up!” Tommy shouted back. His heart pounded in his ears. “Y-yeah, I’ve caused problems and shit in the past, but this-- this wasn’t me!”

“I second that,” Technoblade drawled from behind him. Tommy relaxed incrementally even as the people around him burst into action, scrambling back and drawing weapons and readying themselves for defense. “Tommy might be destructive, but this isn’t his style. Too deliberate to be, really. Most of the damage he causes is completely accidental.”

“Oi!” Tommy snapped. “I--”

“If you make Technoblade’s argument useless by saying that you cause damage on purpose, I will punch us in the face,” Underscore said.

Tommy reconsidered his words. “--didn’t do this!”

“You’re *lying* to me,” Dream accused. “Just like you always do. Hiding things. Lying. Refusing to *listen*.”

Dream already held the higher ground, yet he seemed to grow somehow *taller*. What little confidence Tommy had drained away, and despite how the voices tried to bolster him, pangs of terror had begun gnawing at his bones. He adjusted his grip on the Axe of Peace and tried to shove down his fear, but Dream’s words wormed into his ears and tore through his will like it was tissue paper.

“You’re acting like a *child*, Tommy. Everyone here knows you did it--”

(“You’re acting like a child. You lied to me!”)

In, two, three, four, five--

“--just admit that you were in the wrong and take responsibility--”

Tommy smelled smoke.

Hold, two, three--

“--have to face consequences eventually--”

Out, two, thr--

Out--

He couldn't-- couldn't breathe out, couldn't-- he *couldn't*--

Tommy reached blindly for the others, too far gone in his panic to maintain a facade of normality. Both Underscore and Purpled surged forward as Ran tugged him back, shielding him from the world around them. Technoblade shifted next to them, face blank but shoulders tense. All four of them remembered the words they'd said to him only a day prior, and they had no desire to prove themselves wrong.

Underscore reined in Tommy's terror and honed it into *anger*. Purpled slowly, deliberately, tightened their grip on the Axe of Peace. They drew on it as a grounding weight, focusing on the sensation of the leather grip against their palm. Their breathing slowed, quieting as their heartbeat returned to normal.

Technoblade's shoulders lowered minutely. Purpled and Underscore glanced at him one more time, then turned to face Dream.

"Well?" The tyrant tilted his head. "What do you have to say for yourself?"

"I didn't do it," Underscore snapped. His rage flared hotter, brighter, as Tommy's presence *shuddered* in the mindscape. "Why the *fuck* do you think I'd ever blow this place up, huh?"

Dream paused, and the voices took vicious satisfaction in the fact that they'd managed to catch him off guard. Still, he recovered fairly quickly. "I don't know, because you want attention? Because you're a little *brat* that ruins *everything*?"

"Riiiiight," Underscore drawled. "Sure. Let's just say that's true. Not that it is, your reasons are fucking *idiotic*-- but sure. Then you think *this*--" he gestured at the destruction around them, "--fits my M.O.? TNT? Really?"

Tommy snapped from hazy awareness to full clarity in an instant. "*Underscore. The fuck are you on about?*"

Underscore slid a wave of *calm-patience-reassurance* in his direction as Purpled took over. "Explosions are the fuckin' *worst*. Literally the shittiest way to destroy things."

"So? Methods change all the time. And you have reasonable *motive*--"

Purpled scoffed. "Don't change the subject. What makes you think T-- I'd use TNT? If I wanted to destroy something, I'd tear it down by hand or-- or set it on fire or some shit, I dunno. But *TNT*? If you wanted to frame me, you should have used something else. Fire, maybe. Arson is so much more fun than explosions."

"But you know who does love explosions?" Underscore grinned, bright and deadly as the heart of a neutron star. "*Dream.*"

Dream's fingers twitched. "That's not--"

"I watched L'Manberg blow up twice," Underscore mused. Tommy could feel the rising *rage-hate-KILL* roiling in their gut. "Once by Dream, and once by Wilbur, who-- if I remember correctly, *got* his TNT from Dream. What else am I missing? Right, right, when

you made him drop his stuff into a hole almost every day in exile, and then *blew it up in front of his eyes.*”

Tommy jerked. “*Underscore!*”

Underscore didn’t seem to hear him. He was laser-focused on Dream, near- *blazing* with *hate-hate- hate*. “But no, by all means, there’s absolutely no way Tommy hates TNT! He’s a pyromaniac who would definitely blow up the Community House with the one block that sends him into a fucking *panic attack* because *you* decided it would be a *great* idea to *beat him up* and *wave lit TNT in front of his face* if he didn’t listen to you--”

“*TUBBO!*” Tommy shouted. Their body flinched.

“Shit,” Underscore muttered before he retreated from the front. “***Shit.** Sorry. I crossed the line.*”

Tommy would’ve replied, but the ongoing events took precedence. “--really, Tommy,” Dream was saying. “You’re so *determined* to make me the villain that you’ll make up stories about me? Don’t be ridiculous, I never did any of that-- and now you’re referring to yourself in third person? Pretending to be crazy isn’t going to fool anyone. You blew up the Community House. You fucked up. Now you have to face the consequences.”

Purpled, now alone at the front, bared his teeth in a cold smile. “Yeah? Well, let me ask you this, then. Who was the one who discovered that the Community House was blown up in the first place?”

Dream scoffed. “And now you’re trying to frame me.”

“Dream.”

Technoblade’s voice rang against the crumbling walls. Gazes turned toward him, wary and mistrustful. Purpled followed their stares, allowing his lips to thin as he laid eyes on the man who would soon destroy Tommy’s nation.

But Technoblade wasn’t looking at him. Technoblade was looking at Dream. Technoblade was stepping in front of him, not-so-subtly placing himself between Dream and Tommy. Almost like he was. . . protecting him.

Interesting. Their theory was correct; Technoblade held their loyalty in higher importance than his favor to Dream.

“Tommy didn’t do this,” the piglin hybrid said. “Stop tryin’ to pin it on him.”

Dream’s hand twitched. “Well, who did it then?”

“No idea. But it wasn’t Tommy. He’s been with me the entire time.”

“He’s your ally. You’re lying for him.”

Technoblade scoffed. “Listen, Dream, Tommy and I are only allies for convenience. If he blew up the Community House, I’d just have said it. Clearly us bein’ on the same side already makes him an enemy to most of--” he gestured in the direction of a cluster of L’Manbergians, “--*them*, so why would I lie?”

“He has a point,” Ranboo said. The tension in the air ratcheted up a few notches with his intrusion into the previous two-way standoff. “I . . . I don’t think Tommy did this.”

Dream tilted his head. The silence dragged on for several painful moments, taut with suspense. With each second that ticked past, Purpled sunk deeper into a defensive stance, flexing his fingers around the Axe of Peace.

And then Dream sighed. “You know what? Fine. *Fine*.”

All three voices tensed, but Dream was already turning to Tubbo. “Keep the disc. But Tommy comes with me. Clearly, neither you nor L’Manberg can keep him under control.”

Tommy recoiled so violently that Purpled scrambled to keep their physical body from reacting to it. Thankfully, Technoblade spoke up. “I’m afraid that’s a no, Dream.”

Dream’s head swiveled to face him. “. . . Why not, Technoblade?”

“He’s an ally. I need him for my plans.”

Dream hummed. “And if I used that favor?”

Technoblade shrugged. “Still can’t give you Tommy.”

Dream’s stance shifted. It was near-imperceptible, but the familiarity of it had Tommy’s--Purpled’s heartrate spiking. Dream was *furios*. “I didn’t take you to be a *liar*, Technoblade. You *owe* me. Are you going back on that?”

“I’m not.”

“You just said--”

“I said I *can’t* give you Tommy, Dream.”

Dream stared at him for a long moment. His head tilted, smooth and innocuous as the glide of a venomous cobra. “. . . ‘Can’t’?”

Technoblade’s eyes flicked to Tommy, almost apologetically. Purpled straightened with grim realization, but before he could do anything, Technoblade spoke. “You see, he’s not Tommy at the moment.”

Tommy froze, a spike of icy horror driving straight into their core. Technoblade knew. And he’d just said it out loud in front of *everyone*.

Underscore and Ran scrambled for the front, but Purpled rebuffed them all with *calm-determination-strength*. “. . . Give the man a prize,” the former mercenary drawled. He

shifted, slouching into a more natural stance as his true accent shone through. The part of Tommy that wasn't panicking was fervently thanking Prime that they'd practiced how to fight. If shit hit the fan, Purpled would probably get them out alive. "You're right, I'm not Tommy."

Tubbo spoke, his voice cracking. "Wh. . . what?"

"I'm not Tommy," Purpled repeated. Technoblade had already outed them; he might as well use it to get them out of this mess. "Hmm. . . to explain, or not to explain?"

"Don't say we're from the future," Underscore warned. His voice was shaking, but his mental walls didn't falter. "That'll paint a target on Tommy's back. It's better if Dream thinks he broke in Exile. Technoblade's trying to draw blame off of Tommy right now, and if everyone thinks we're voices or Dream keeps blaming us, Tommy can claim that we made him do it--"

Technoblade took the decision out of their hands. "You're one of the others. The alters."

"Not quite. We're his voices. His 'Chat', if you will." Purpled flashed a smile, cold and sharp and as un-Tommy-like as he could make it. "Though we're not quite like yours. Much less demanding for blood, much more. . . sentient." He waved his hand. "Look, Tommy didn't do this. He's been in the Arctic this entire time, trying to figure us out. He thought he was hallucinating. He wasn't," he added when he saw the look on Tubbo's face. "We were always there, we just. . . weren't very vocal. Exile drew us out."

"Tommy," Dream said.

"Oh look, the Walmart teletubby talks," Purpled said. "Not my name, by the way."

Dream frowned. Purpled imagined stabbing him in the face, then wondered if that desire was Underscore's or his own. "Stop pretending, Tommy."

"He doesn't believe us. Figures." Purpled huffed. "Well, we don't care about you anyway, so you can leave."

Dream adjusted his grip on his sword. It was a warning. One that Purpled ignored, turning to Tubbo.

"You," he said. "We need to talk."

A cold hand settled on his shoulder. Beside him, Technoblade shifted but didn't move to remove Dream. "Don't ignore me."

Purpled considered his options. He needed to get people to believe the whole 'we're not Tommy' shtick, but the *how* was an issue.

One thing at a time. He grasped Dream's wrist and flicked it away. "Don't touch us."

Dream was silent for a moment. Then he relaxed, lowering his sword. Purpled was instantly on guard, half-expecting a surprise attack.

“Tubbo,” Dream said. He splayed a hand towards the teenager. “Give me the disc.”

Tubbo jerked, gaze snapping between Dream and Tommy. He clutched the disc closer to his chest. “I-- huh?”

“*Oh fuck no*,” Underscore hissed.

“Give it to me.” Dream tilted his head. His gaze remained fixed on Purpled. “After all, if you’re not Tommy, you won’t mind, *right?*”

Purpled’s eyes slid between the disc and Dream’s outstretched hand. If he said yes, the others would take it as proof that Tommy was faking - which, by proxy, would make Tommy look dishonest and give Dream an excuse (however faulty) to take Tommy with him. If he said no, Tubbo would give Dream the disc, and that was the last thing Tommy wanted. They’d been backed into a corner. The only way out was to--

“*Break the disc*,” Tommy said.

Purpled went still. Underscore and Ran let out matching cries of protest.

“*Break it*,” Tommy insisted. “*It’s the only way they’ll ever believe you.*”

“*But-- your discs!*” Underscore protested. “*They’re--*”

“*People over discs*,” Tommy snapped back. “*Do it, Purpled. I’ll pretend to be mad when I’m back. Just fucking do it, it’ll get Dream off our back.*”

Purpled turned his attention outward, suddenly aware of the silence around them. Dream was watching them. Waiting for an answer. Waiting for them to slip.

“Well,” Purpled deadpanned. “I do care about Tommy in a sense, and given how you’re always holding the discs over his head, I think I *do* mind.”

“*Purpled!*” Tommy shouted.

Dream smiled.

Purpled smiled back. “So I think it’ll be better if I just remove the problem altogether.”

Before anyone could react, he lunged across the six feet between him and Tubbo and snatched the disc from his hands. Loud shouts rang through the Community house, only to fall silent when the sound of screeching metal split the air.

Purpled hefted the axe over his shoulder and kicked the jagged metal shards away, ignoring the flash of *sorrow-loss-anger* Tommy hastily smothered. “There,” he said. “That’s one disc down. Now he doesn’t have to worry about it anymore.”

Tubbo was staring at him, a sort of dawning *horror* in his eyes. Purpled looked back towards Dream so the other three wouldn’t have to see it.

“Well?” he drawled. “Convinced enough?”

Dream’s hands curled inward, finger by finger, knuckles strained white beneath his gloves. Purpled slid his right foot a few inches forward, retaining a deceptively relaxed stance that would allow him to intercept Dream if the man went for Tubbo.

“Give it up,” Purpled said when it became obvious that the other man wasn’t going to speak first. “He’s not yours, never was, and never will be. Not if we have a say in it.”

“This isn’t over.”

“It’s not,” Purpled agreed. “But you’re not going to win here. Leave.”

When Dream still didn’t move, Ran slid forward and narrowed their eyes. Purpled twisted their lips into a scowl. The expression was both hostile and utterly foreign on Tommy’s face, and when they spoke, some of Ran’s guttural growl leaked into their voice.

“I said, **leave.**”

“This isn’t over,” Dream repeated, but he swiveled on his heel and stalked out of the Community house. They watched him go in silence.

“What the fuck was that?”

Purpled stiffened and very deliberately did not look up at Quackity. This Quackity hadn’t done anything to him yet. There was no need to be afraid.

Instead, he turned to Technoblade. “Head back first,” he told him. “I have to explain some things to the people here.”

Technoblade eyed him. “Not joinin’ your L’Manberg buddies?”

“I’ve never been a part of L’Manberg,” Purpled pointed out. He ignored how a collective flinch rippled through the crowd. “But yeah, no. We’ll head back to your place when we’re done. Feed Argos for us, will you?”

“That’s your job,” Technoblade reminded them, as much of a jab as a silent demand that they return safely. “You all come back in one piece or I’ll have to overthrow a country.”

With that, he spun around and stalked off with a dramatic swirl of his cape. Nobody tried to stop him.

“*Dramatic bastard,*” Tommy muttered. “*Thinks he’s so cool with the threats and shit--*”

“T-Tommy?”

Right. No more putting this off, then. “Not Tommy,” Purpled corrected, turning around. Tubbo shrunk under his cold stare, then straightened in a valiant attempt to intimidate them.

“Bring Tommy back.”

“Doesn’t work that way,” Purpled said. He slung the Axe of Peace over his shoulder, ignoring the way the people around him stiffened in alarm. “Tubbo, was it?”

Tubbo’s eyes narrowed. “Y-yes. Can I talk to Tommy?”

Without looking away from Tubbo, Purpled prodded Tommy with *inquiry-calm-understanding*. Tommy’s presence roiled, clearly conflicted, before he finally settled.

“. . . I don’t think. . . not-- not right now. I can’t-- I need some time. Sorry. Just. Give me a minute.”

And with that, his presence fled into the darkest corners of the mindscape. Ran jerked like wanted to follow, but clearly thought better of it and settled for drifting somewhere near the middle.

“Sorry, Tommy’s not available right now,” Purpled said to Tubbo. The teenager’s face grew mutinous, but before he could argue, Purpled added, “One of us does want to talk to you, though.”

Tubbo studied him. “And. . . if I don’t want to talk to them?”

Purpled jabbed a thumb in the general direction in which Technoblade had disappeared. “Then we go back to him. Your choice.”

Tubbo swallowed. “I’ll. . . talk to. Um. The voice?”

Purpled stepped aside. Underscore all but *lunged* into control, having been waiting since the moment Dream left. His body language changed, weight distribution sliding to his center and shoulders pulling back. He took a moment to orient himself, then dispelled the Axe of Peace and crossed his arms. His younger self shifted under his gaze, hand drifting towards his inventory, but all Underscore did was glower.

“Listen,” he snapped. “I know Dream pressured you to exile Tommy. He’s a bastard like that, and a good chunk of this is his fault, but what you did *wasn’t okay*.”

Whatever Tubbo had been expecting him to say, it apparently hadn’t been that. “Wh-what?”

“Exiling him was a dick move, man.” Underscore’s scowl darkened. “A *real* dick move.”

Tubbo reacted instinctively, growing defensive. “It was for the greater good!”

“*Fuck* the greater good! You’re basically Dream’s puppet now! L’Manberg has no autonomy! You tried to *execute* Technoblade without a fair trial, you kicked out one of the founders and lost the respect of almost everyone around you! What part of this looks *good* to you, *huh?*”

“*Prime, Underscore,*” Ran murmured. “*You don’t have to tear him apart.*”

Tubbo was pale, but he clung to his beliefs with the desperation of a dying man. “If I didn’t exile him, Dream would’ve built obsidian walls around us - we would’ve starved!”

“So become an autonomous country or something! Build hidden farms, hidden passageways to get out of L’Manberg - for fuck’s sake, Dream was going to send *two* people to patrol an entire *country*! You’re capable of sneaking out!”

“You don’t understand--”

“Oh, I understand *perfectly*.” Underscore stalked closer, ignoring how Tubbo shrank back. “Much more than you think. Sure, Tommy isn’t dead. It doesn’t make anything that happened to him *in exile* okay-- and yeah, sure, that was mostly Dream, but the least you could do is *try* to see what he went through. Word of advice? Take another look around the exile spot. Look at what Dream did to the kid who gave up everything for your damn country. And then maybe, *just maybe*, you’ll see why I want you to fucking *apologize*.”

He turned away from the stunned look on Tubbo’s face and surveyed the rest of the crowd. “As for the rest of you! This shouldn’t be a problem yet, but watch out for red vines or flowers. If you see them, stay the *fuck* away or burn them. Capiche? Capiche.” He pulled out the axe, then an ender pearl. “I’m going now. Don’t follow me, or I’ll knock you out.”

“Wait--” someone said, but Underscore could feel Tommy stirring in the back of their mind. He turned on his heel and hurled the ender pearl into the sky, watching as it disappeared over the hulking waterfalls surrounding them. Just as someone’s fingers brushed his shoulder, he felt the *tug* of teleportation in his stomach. A moment later, he was stumbling onto the wooden slats of the Prime Path, the ruins of the Community House far behind him.

He broke into a sprint as shouting rose up behind him. In the back of their mind, he felt Tommy’s awareness resurface, dim but strung tight with *caution-worry-fear*.

“*It’s over now*,” Purpled said. “*We’re heading back to Technoblade’s*.”

Tommy unwound, creeping closer to the front. Underscore kept a firm grip on their limbs but slid aside enough for them to share headspace, allowing him to ground himself in physical sensation.

They took a sharp turn off the Prime Path and retrieved an ender pearl, hurling it into the air. Sprint, zigzag, pearl - sprint, zigzag, pearl. It was a common tactic Underscore had used in the future to lose his pursuers. With each pearl they threw, the shouts behind them faded further. Only when they were certain they were no longer being pursued did they slow to a stride, panting as sweat gathered beneath the plates of their armor.

“Fuck that fucking *sucked*,” Tommy gasped, reaching up and pulling their helmet off. The breeze running through their hair cooled their burning face. “My stamina is *shit*, oh my Prime.”

“*Better than it was before we started training with Technoblade*,” Purpled pointed out. “*You’ve-- we’ve gotten better. Almost back to full health*.”

Underscore slid back as the shoreline drew near, overshadowed by Pandora’s Vault. Despite the protest in his aching muscles, Tommy sped up. The rowboat they’d used to get to the mainland was sitting where he’d left it, a sign of *safety* and *home*.

Jubilation rose, unbidden, in his chest. He was heading back to Technoblade's, because he hadn't betrayed him. Dream didn't have Mellohi, and he'd never spoken those damned words to Tubbo. Tentatively, he allowed himself to hope. Maybe the future really could be changed-

-

Something heavy struck him across the back of his head. Tommy staggered, falling to his knees as the three voices exploded into alarmed shouting. Purpled tried to push them to their feet, but a second blow sent him reeling into the sand. Underscore tried to draw their axe, rolling over to block the next attack, but he was too slow. Gleaming netherite slid through their neck, pinning them to the ground. Ran knew from experience that they couldn't survive a wound like this, but they *had* to because Tommy needed them and the Crimson was still out there and *please no let us live--*

Blood filled their lungs, staining the world with scarlet. The last thing they saw was *green*.

thus always to the victors

Chapter Summary

Dream has Tommy and everything is terrible.

The 'Time-Travel Fix-It' tag works overtime to make sure the 'Happy Ending' tag gets a continued lease on life.

Chapter Notes

questionable quality and logic in certain parts of this chapter, but it would've dragged on forever otherwise so yeet

TW: Major Character Death, c!Dream being the literal worst, Gaslighting, Discussion of Abuse

"Tommy. Wake up."

Cold seeped into his back. Tommy scowled, rolling onto his side and curling deeper into the mattress. Argos must've stolen the blankets again, but he was too sleepy to get up and steal them back.

His face pressed against rough stone. The edge of something cold and hard bit into his wrists, accompanied by the rattle of metal against metal. Tommy frowned.

"Tommy."

Tommy's eyes snapped open. He found himself staring at a pair of shoes. A very familiar pair of shoes. A pair of shoes his ribs were well-acquainted with.

"Tommy," said the owner of the shoes. There was impatience in his voice. "Come on. Get up."

Slowly, Tommy pushed himself into a sitting position. He kept his gaze fixed on the shoes. Looking at the shoes was better than looking at--

"Look at me."

Tommy's head obeyed the order almost automatically, snapping up. His gaze met Dream's mask. The man's lips were set in a neutral line. He didn't seem angry, or upset, or anything at

all.

"How do you feel?" he asked. Tommy licked his lips, swallowing as the metallic tang of blood bloomed across his tongue.

"Am I-- dead?"

"You were," said Dream. "I brought you back."

Tommy stared at him. Unbidden, his hand rose to feel his throat - only to recoil when rough scar tissue met his fingertips. The voices had said something about Dream having a revival book, but he hadn't thought-- "Y-you killed me."

"I did."

"You *killed me!*" Tommy's voice rose, streaked with panic. "You-- you shoved a fuckin' *sword* through my neck-- oh fuck-- fuck I was--"

He choked on the phantom sensation of sharpened netherite in his throat, doubling over and curling in on himself. The shackles around his wrists rattled as he clawed at his shirt collar, gasping for air.

"Are you done?" Dream asked, so flat and unbothered that the wind was knocked right out of Tommy's sails. Tommy wheezed, mouth wide open as he tried to take in precious air. Dream waited as he struggled through a panic attack, mouth set with a displeased tilt. Tommy clung to the breathing exercises Purpled had taught him, praying that Dream's impatience wouldn't tip over into rage. *In for four, hold for seven, out for eight.* . .

When he'd gained some semblance of control over himself, he swallowed and raised his gaze again. "Where am I?"

"My base." Dream's head tilted by a single degree. "It's well-secured and well-hidden. Don't bother trying to escape."

Shit. "Why did you take me here?"

"You fuck everything up," Dream said, but his voice was perfectly level - nothing like the shouting and raging he'd done at the Community House. He said it like it was *fact*. "I can't let you do that anymore."

Tommy bared his teeth. "Techno will come for me--"

"Techno will come for you? Ha!" The sudden switch from placid calm to maniacal jeering had Tommy flinching back. "You know what he'll think when he waits for you and you never show up? Especially after you told him to go on ahead?"

The blood drained from Tommy's face. Dream smiled. "Exactly. He'll think you *betrayed* him. Just like how Tubbo thinks you've gone back to *Techno*. And by the time they realize that you're gone. . . you'll be fixed."

Tommy couldn't breathe. "Fixed?" he croaked out. "What do you mean-- *fixed*?"

Dream's head tipped sideways, like a hawk inspecting a worm. "I've already started. You haven't noticed?" When Tommy just stared at him, he added, "You're head's quiet now, isn't it?"

And suddenly, Tommy became aware of the gaping *void* in his skull. He couldn't feel them. Couldn't *hear* them. The voices were--

No. Not gone. They *couldn't* be.

"Guys," he called, flooding the core of his mindscape with waves of *fear-fear-fear*. "Can you hear me?"

Silence.

"G-guys?"

Silence.

"Say something," he begged. "This isn't-- this isn't *funny*, c'mon--"

Dream watched as he curled into a ball, burying his hands in his hair. "Interesting," he said. Tommy stilled, head whipping up to face him.

"You," he croaked. Dream tilted his head, and suddenly Tommy's fear felt like *nothing* in the face of his rage.

"What did you do to them?!" he lunged forward, the manacles around his wrists pulling taut. "What the *fuck* did you do to them, you bastard?!"

"Oh, Tommy," Dream said. "Dying fixes your body. Whatever created your delusions has been healed."

"They weren't delusions!" Tommy screamed. "They were-- they were *real*! You can't fool me!"

Dream shrugged. "I'm telling the truth. I fixed you. Think of it as-- a factory reset, if you will."

"No. You--" Tommy shook his head. "You're *lying*."

Dream sighed. "You can't hear them anymore. Why else would they be gone?"

"They-- they're--" Tommy scrambled for another answer, something, *anything*, to explain this because *the voices were real. They had to be*. "They're not--"

"Because they *weren't real*, Tommy." Dream smiled, all teeth and sadistic joy. "You imagined them so you'd feel a little less lonely. You chose them over your *real* friend. Me."

Tommy couldn't breathe. He gasped for air, clutching his ribs as tears burned his eyes. "No. No. You're not-- you're not my--"

"And now that you're healed, now that *I'm* here--" Dream cupped his hands around Tommy's face, faux-gentle, and tilted it up, "--you don't need them anymore. So your brain stopped making them up."

Tommy watched through glazed eyes as Dream leaned close. The smiling mask filled his vision.

"Don't worry, Tommy," the man crooned. "You won't need them ever again. I'll fix you, okay? No matter how many times I have to revive you. I'll fix you."

Tommy stopped breathing. Tommy stopped blinking. Tommy simply *stopped*, and for a moment, everything was okay. He wasn't here. He wasn't in this cell, trapped with Dream. This was a nightmare. Surely, surely he'd wake up, and then he'd be back in Technoblade's house and the voices would greet him like they always did.

And then Dream's grip tightened, nails digging into Tommy's face. "Hey, don't check out on me. You're not seeing more imaginary friends, are you?"

The pain dragged Tommy out of his daze, pinpricks of fire bursting against his cheekbones. He couldn't feel pain in his dreams. This wasn't a nightmare. This was real. The voices were gone, Dream was here, and nobody was coming for him.

Tommy opened his mouth and *screamed*.

"Ranboo Beloved, if you don't wake up in the next five seconds, I'm going to start stabbing."

"Bwuh--" Ran shot up, nearly headbutting the person looming over him. Underscore leaned back to avoid it. "Wh-- *Underscore?*"

"Ran. We have a problem."

Ran's head snapped to Purpled, who was in the process of getting to his feet. It appeared to be quite a struggle - Purpled kept misjudging the weight of his now-netherite left leg, and was leaning heavily on a tree as he tried to readjust to his prosthetic. The mercenary scowled when their gazes met, jerking his chin to the side in a clear gesture of *get-up-now*.

Ran, however, was more focused on the shock of white hair hanging above his left eye. Without thinking, he reached up to grasp at his own hair - only to misjudge where his hands were and whack himself in the face. Underscore snorted.

"We're back in our own bodies. Try not to poke your eye out while you adjust."

Ran chose to ignore that comment. “Is this. . . Spawn?”

“Yup. And as you can see, we respawned *outside* of Tommy's head.”

“Tommy. . .?” Ran wracked his spotty memory for what had happened. Right, they’d been headed back to Technoblade’s, but someone had ambushed them and killed th--

Dream. Dream killed them. And now he had Tommy’s body, as well as a revive book.

“Oh,” Ran said faintly. “That *is* a problem.”

“Which is why you should try to get used to your body,” Underscore said flatly. “We’re staging a jailbreak, and we’re on a time limit.”

Ran grimaced, braced himself, and rolled onto his hands and knees. Several months of adjustment didn’t erase a lifetime’s worth of familiarity - after two tries, he managed to wobble to his feet. From the corner of his eye, he saw Purpled step away from the tree he was leaning on, shaky but *walking*. Underscore, meanwhile, had already gotten walking down pat and was now testing a few kicks and punches. He overbalanced an uppercut and nearly fell on his back.

“We-- have to make a decision,” Purpled grunted as he gingerly raised his foot. “We did come back to stop the Egg, and it’s weak right now. We could go deal with the Egg, or. . . rescue Tommy.”

“Tommy,” Ran and Underscore said simultaneously. “Tommy first,” Ran added. “He’s-- he’s the priority. The Egg can wait a little longer.”

Purpled’s lips quirked sideways. “Then we’re all in agreement. We do need gear and weaponry before we raid Dream’s base, though. Where can we get it?”

“Technoblade.” Underscore held up a hand when Ran and Purpled turned matching stares of disbelief on him. “Hear me out. I know he’s doesn’t trust us, and he might get in the way of us killing Dream if he gets involved. So we steal from him instead.”

“That’s right,” Ran breathed. “He showed Tommy-- showed *us* where he stashed all of his gear. We can just-- sneak in, grab it, and go.”

“While I agree with this, I do have to ask-- if we’re not telling Technoblade, are we telling *anyone*? I’m pretty sure the three of us can take on Dream, but it would be easier to keep him pinned if he’s surrounded.” Purpled’s eyes darkened. “He’s. . . slippery.”

Underscore shook his head. “Best not to say anything for now. It’ll take too long to explain. And every second Dream is with Tommy--”

He didn’t need to finish that sentence. They’d all witnessed firsthand what Dream did-- could do-- *was likely doing* to Tommy.

“Right,” Ran said. “Quick in and out. Stealing from Technoblade and Philza. No big deal. Easy.”

He overbalanced his next step and fell on his face. Purpled snorted.

“Don’t jinx it. Now hurry up, can use the journey there to practice running.”

“When will he be back?”

“I don’t know,” Technoblade grumbled for the third time that hour. He reread the line he’d been staring at for the past three minutes, trying to force his brain to comprehend it. Unfortunately, the anxiety buzzing in the back of his mind took up a good chunk of his processing power. With a sigh, he bookmarked his page and shut the tome. A glance out the window showed that the sun was setting - well after the time Tommy was supposed to be back.

Philza glanced at him from where he was sitting cross-legged on the floorboards, tending to an armful of sleepy puppy. “. . . Do you think he’s not coming back?”

“. . . I don’t know. I thought he wouldn’t leave Argos, at least.” Technoblade closed his eyes. “Maybe I was wrong.”

The voice hadn’t *looked* like they were lying when they told him they’d be going back, but maybe they’d just been better at lying than pretending to be Tommy. Or maybe Tommy had regained control and decided to return to L’Manberg, Even if the whole mess with Tommy’s exile hadn’t exactly been cleared when he’d left, the L’Manbergians *had* seemed pretty horrified with the ‘Tommy’s-hearing-voices’ deal. Maybe he won his way back in with sympathy points--

“Mate, I can *hear* you overthinking.” Philza adjusted his grip on Argos, lowering his voice so he wouldn’t wake the snoozing puppy. “Stop worrying. If he’s not back by tomorrow morning, we’ll sneak into L’Manberg and get a look at what’s going on, yeah?”

“Yeah,” Technoblade grunted, rubbing a thumb over his brow to stave off his incoming headache. “Sounds like a plan.”

They both straightened when the buzz of a communicator rang through the room. Technoblade pulled his out, heartrate quickening. Maybe it was a message from Tommy, explaining where he’d been--

It wasn’t. The red notification icon hovered over a name it hadn’t appeared with since the Manberg-Pogtopia era. Swallowing his apprehension, Technoblade opened the message.

<Tubbo_> *is tommy with you?*

For a moment, Technoblade stared at the screen, uncomprehending. No, Tommy was obviously not with him. But if Tubbo was asking, then that meant Tommy wasn’t with *L’Manberg* either. Which meant that Tommy was missing.

Tommy was missing.

Philza craned his head as though he could somehow see the communicator screen from across the room. “Techno? What is it?”

Technoblade didn’t reply, mind racing as he forced himself to stay calm. There could be a logical, not-at-all panic-inducing explanation for this. Tommy was probably just en route to the cabin. The journey over did take a while, especially when one had to row across an entire ocean. Sure, it had already been *hours*, but maybe Tommy was just taking the scenic route--

<Tubbo_> tihs is his right?

There was an image file attached to the message. Staring at the blood-splattered Axe of Peace, Technoblade finally allowed the panic to set in.

“The tracks end here,” Fundy called.

Tubbo strode down the beach, Quackity at his heels. Fundy was standing beside a muddy indent in the sand, indicative of a rowboat. The beach was littered with footprints and scuff marks, as though someone had dragged their shoes through the imprints in an attempt to wipe them out.

“So he’s gone,” Quackity said. “Crossed the ocean and went back to Technoblade.”

Fundy nodded, expression grim. “Seems like it.”

“Fuck.”

Tubbo allowed his gaze to wander across the scene, searching for inconsistencies. His eye caught on something glimmering in the sand just next to the boat indent, untouched by the waves. He shuffled over and leaned down to inspect it - only to freeze.

It was an axe. A *netherite* axe, glowing with enchantments and hilt stained with half-dried blood. Tommy had been wielding an axe that looked awfully similar to this one, sans the blood.

Staring at the weapon, Tubbo felt a cold stone sink in his gut. The axe was well-made and endowed with high-level enchantments - if it was Tommy’s, there was no way he would’ve just *left* it here. And the *blood*-- it was on the *hilt*, not the *blade*--

Kneeling down, he brushed sand away from the handle - revealing the name engraved on its handle. *The Axe of Peace*. Not what Tommy would normally call his weapons. Maybe the. . . *voices* had named it. Or maybe. . .

Half-impulsively, Tubbo reached for his communicator and snapped a picture of the axe. Then he switched over to a messaging tab he hadn't used since the Manberg-Pogtopia War.

Private Messaging: Technoblade

<Tubbo_> *is tommy with you?*

<Tubbo_> *tihs is his right?*

A few swipes of his fingers had the image attaching itself at the end of the last message.

Quackity peered over his shoulder. "I don't like this."

"I know. It's just. . ." Tubbo swallowed. "Tommy's not here. And this axe-- if it *is* his--"

His communicator buzzed. Tubbo looked down at the newest message--

<Technoblade> *no*

--and nearly collapsed as relief flooded his veins. He slumped, letting out a huff, when his communicator buzzed again. He raised it to see what else Technoblade had to say--

The newfound relief crystallized into pure, icy *terror*.

<Technoblade> *he's not with me.*

<Technoblade> *and yes, that's his axe.*

"Right. We've got a chestplate for you and Purpled. . . boots, pants, check-- oh, I still need a helmet."

Underscore silently swiped a diamond helmet off of the nearest armor stand and presented it to Ran. The ender hybrid took it with a nod of acknowledgement.

"You've gotten all the weapons you need?"

"Ah, I need a shield too. . ."

"I knew we forgot something," Underscore muttered. He turned on his heel, scanning the room. "*Are* there shields in here? Oh-- nevermind."

“Would it be better to load up on strength or healing?” Purpled wondered aloud, peering at the chests full of potions lining the wall.

Ran looked over from where he was weighing a shield in his hands. “What about regeneration? Does Technoblade have regen?”

“*Heh?*”

None of them had noticed the fourth person entering the room. “Fuck,” Underscore and Purpled said in unison. Ran froze elbow-deep in a pile of shields, then slowly turned around with a guilty look on his face.

Technoblade glowered at the three of them, eyes darting from one face to the next. “You-- who are you? Why are you in my basement? What--” The sword he was clutching dipped slightly as he squinted at Ran. “You look like that one guy in the Butcher Army. Ranboo, right? And. . . *Tubbo?*”

“Aha. Er.” Ran cleared his throat. “Not. . . exactly.”

Technoblade’s eyes narrowed. He adjusted his grip on his sword.

“We can explain,” said Purpled.

“Then start explainin’, or I start stabbin’.”

“We’re Tommy’s voices.”

Technoblade stared at him. “Excuse me?”

“We’re Tommy’s voices,” Purpled repeated. “Dream killed Tommy after he left the Community House. We respawned in our original bodies.”

“I--” Technoblade shook his head. “That’s impossible. Voices aren’t people--”

“How else would we know about Argos?”

Technoblade tensed, his sword rising in defensive anger. Purpled stood firm against the implied threat.

“*Think*, Technoblade. We were there when you gave us Argos. Nobody else knows about him besides you, Tommy, and Philza. We *hid* him whenever you had visitors.”

“You’re. . . not lyin’,” Technoblade said slowly. He straightened warily, lowering his sword as his gaze swept across them. Something like recognition flashed in his eyes. “You’re the cold one, aren’t you?”

“The. . . cold one?”

“Yeah. The-- voice. Tommy’s voice.” At the judgmental stare he received, Technoblade huffed. “Listen, I wasn’t exactly worryin’ about coming up with a name for you. Was a bit

preoccupied about Tommy *havin'* voices in the first place and all. Wait. No. How are you even here? Why do you two look like Tubbo and Ranboo?"

"They *are* Tubbo and Ranboo. Or they were. They go by Ran and Underscore now." Purpled hesitated for a moment, then forged ahead. "We lived through an apocalypse, tried to go back in time to stop it, and ended up in Tommy's head by accident."

"*Purpled!*" Underscore yelped.

"We might as well tell him," Purpled said. "There's no other plausible explanation, and lying to him will just distract him from getting Tommy back."

"You can't just--"

"You're time travelers," Technoblade interrupted flatly.

The three aforementioned time travelers glanced at each other. "Yes," Ran confirmed reluctantly.

Technoblade squinted at them. "You know, that makes a surprising amount of sense."

"You. . . believe us?"

"You look like older versions of, uh, Tubbo and Ranboo. And I don't think-- anyone would come up with something as unbelievable as 'we're from the future' if they wanted to lie." Something in Technoblade's eyes darkened. "So what's this about Tommy? You said. . . Dream killed him?"

"And likely brought him back," Underscore muttered bitterly. At the bewildered stare he received, he elaborated. "Dream has a revival book that can bring people back after their third death. He. . . in our future, he liked experimenting with it. We're pretty sure he killed us so he could drag us back to his base, then revive us and use us as a. . . as a test subject, or something. Point is, Tommy probably isn't dead anymore, but, uh, Dream has him."

Technoblade exhaled sharply, shoulders slumping. "Yeah. Tubbo-- the other Tubbo-- messaged me. He, uh, found the Axe of Peace."

"Dream killed us before we could get into the boat," Ran said. "We must've dropped it."

"Right. Right." Technoblade dispelled his sword and leaned back, running a critical eye over the three of them. "And now you're raidin' my weapons so you can rescue Tommy?"

Underscore raised his chin defiantly. "We don't have time to make our own armor, and you have--"

Technoblade held up a hand. "That's fine. But I'm comin' with you."

"--plenty of extras so--" Underscore registered his words. "What?"

"I'm comin' with," Technoblade repeated. "To rescue Tommy."

In the brief moment of nonplussed silence, he swept past Purpled and over to the potions chest. He already had his armor and weapons on him, but if he was joining a rescue mission, potions were a requirement.

“Wh-- no, you can’t,” Underscore protested, a beat too late.

Technoblade would’ve replied, but Purpled beat him to it. “Why not?”

“He’s *Technoblade*! He owes Dream a favor--”

Technoblade’s eyebrows shot up. Ah, so they knew about that - and yet they’d entrusted Tommy’s safety to him anyway. Interesting.

“So he doesn’t have to confront Dream directly,” Purpled countered. “And he’s proven that he’s trustworthy--”

“--a few sparring lessons doesn’t make him *trustworthy*!”

“He fed and sheltered us for months,” Ran pointed out. “He protected us from Dream when he came looking for us, and he specifically prevented Tommy from going to the Mainland.”

“I *know*,” Underscore snapped.

“Then why are you so against--”

“*Because he killed Tommy!*”

Technoblade went stiff, knuckles bleaching white around a bottle of Regeneration. Without thinking, he turned around. “What?”

Underscore whipped about to face him, eyes wild. “*Shit*,” he hissed, shaking his head and looking away. “No, just-- forget I said anything.”

“No, no, what do you mean I killed Tommy?” Technoblade demanded, rising to his feet. When none of the time travelers met his gaze, his voice gained a distinct growl. “*What. Do you mean.*”

“It wasn’t you,” Purpled said flatly. “Just something puppeting your body.”

“I watched,” Underscore whispered. “You were smiling.”

Technoblade didn’t know what to say to that, so he turned his focus on the information Purpled had divulged. “‘Puppeting my body’?”

“The. . . thing that caused our apocalypse could control minds,” Purpled answered. “It. . . interacted strangely with your voices. They took control of you and, ah, helped kill Tommy.”

“Ah.” Technoblade winced as the aforementioned voices swelled in volume, babbling in astonishment and horror at the newest revelations. He now had more proof that these three were really from the future, because a) he rarely told people about his voices, and b) not

many people knew that voice-possessed hybrids were a thing. “Well. I can promise I definitely have no intention of killin’ Tommy. And neither do my voices.”

“Please, Underscore,” Ran murmured. “He’s on our side now.”

Underscore released an explosive breath. He dragged a hand down his face, then leveled a glower at Technoblade. “Fine,” he ground out. “But if you *dare* hurt Tommy--”

“I won’t,” Technoblade swore. “Not unless he betrays me first.”

“And that’s all we ask for,” Purpled said, forestalling Underscore’s angry retort. “Now if you don’t mind, can we also get some potions? We’re wasting time.”

At the reminder of their limited time, the air in the basement grew heavy. Technoblade turned back to the potions chests and shuffled to the side, allowing the other three access - which they promptly took advantage of.

It was quiet for a few minutes, interspersed only by the clinking of glass bottles. When the tense silence grew too thick, Technoblade cast about for something to break it. He finally settled on a topic he’d been wanting to ask about-- but hadn’t out of fear of offense. Still, it was something he needed to know. “So. . . Tommy didn’t have DID.”

Underscore didn’t look up from the bottles. “No, he didn’t.”

Technoblade grimaced. “I suppose it’s too much to hope that Dream abusing Tommy was a misconception as well?”

Underscore’s responding bark of laughter raised the hairs along Technoblade’s arms. “Oh, no, the bastard abused Tommy alright. Tommy wasn’t faking how scared he was, and just because he doesn’t have DID doesn’t mean that what he went through was *any less real*.”

Technoblade held up his hands. “I wasn’t implyin’ any of that.”

“I know,” Underscore sighed, deflating. “Sorry. I just. . . I. . .” he grabbed at the air in some vague gesture of inexpressible rage, then settled on a vehement “Fuck Dream. Fuck him. He needs to die.”

“Cheers to that,” Purpled deadpanned. He shoved one last potion in his inventory, then pushed himself to his feet and turned to Technoblade. “Do you happen to have any daggers or throwing knives?”

“As a matter of fact,” Technoblade said, “yes. They’re in the chest in the back corner over there--”

He was interrupted by the creak of the ladder. Philza poked his head into the basement, face set with slight concern. “Everything alright, Techno? You’ve been down here for a while, and I thought I heard--” he zeroed in on the three intruders. “Ranboo? *Tubbo?*”

Purpled huffed. “And Purpled. I know I wasn’t involved in most events, but *come on*.”

“Hi Phil,” said Technoblade. “There’s a perfectly reasonable explanation for this.”

Philza’s eyes darted between him and the gaggle of intruders. “Er-- and what is ‘this’, exactly?”

Technoblade glanced at Underscore, who just closed his eyes and let out a heavy, heavy breath. “Come down,” he said in Philza’s general direction. “You’re here, so you might as well help.”

Philza warily slid down the ladder and slunk to Technoblade’s side. His hands hovered at his sides, ready to pull a weapon from his inventory at a moment’s notice.

“Relax, old man,” Technoblade grumbled. “It’s about Tommy.”

If anything, Philza only tensed *further*. When he spoke, his voice was pitched low enough that only Technoblade could hear it. “Do they think you did something?”

“No. Let them explain, Phil.”

Philza turned to the intruders, wings bristling with suspicion. “Well?” he demanded, crossing his arms.

With a sigh, Purpled stepped forward and began to explain.

<Technoblade> has created a chat.

<Technoblade> has added 38 people to the chat.

<Technoblade> we have a situation

<Technoblade> dream has kidnapped tommy

<Technoblade> tommy’s voices are actually people from the future who know where dream has taken tommy

<Technoblade> also they have physical bodies separate from tommy now

<Technoblade> we’re going to go save Tommy

<Technoblade> anyone want to join?

<Quackity> ok first of all what the fuck

<Tubbo_> time travel????

*0
1 2 3 4 5*

<Tubbo> surprise

<Tubbo> . youre

<Tubbo> me?

<Tubbo> from the future yeah

<Purpled> we're wasting time.

<Purpled> 49.16185/-60.34233/177.37798

<Purpled> be there in half an hour or be left behind

<Purpled> wait what

Apparently, half an hour was enough time for people to prepare for war *and* march halfway across the Nether. Which really said something about the average lifestyle of a citizen of the Dream SMP, but that was beside the point. Quite a few people had shown up to save Tommy; Underscore was pretty sure a good number of them were only there to gawk at the “time travelers”, but whatever their motives, they could help keep Dream pinned.

Or they could, if they stopped *freaking out* about them looking like older versions of people they knew. His younger self kept *staring* at him with that fucking *look* on his face and Quackity and Fundy and Sam kept asking questions and and Purpled was wound tighter than a bowstring and they were wasting *time*.

“We’ll be answering questions later,” he snapped out over the general hubbub of the crowd, falling back on his experience from his President days and leaving no room for argument.

“We can talk later when Dream *isn't* torturing Tommy.”

That sufficiently cowed most of them, though Jack still looked somewhere between mutinous and horrified. Good enough. Underscore jerked his head towards the nether portal swirling behind him, eyes cold.

“Beyond that portal is Dream’s secret base. You’re going to go in, *quietly*, and wait for us to kill him. When he respawns at the top of the platform - you’ll see what I’m talking about - Ran will teleport him to you. Do whatever it takes to keep him trapped in the main chamber and *away* from the exits.” He turned towards Technoblade. “Technoblade. Your job is to guard the nether portal from this side in case he comes through this way.”

Technoblade jerked, his eyes narrowing. “I’m going in.”

“No, you’re not,” Underscore said, and when Technoblade opened his mouth to protest, he added, “You owe Dream a favor.”

Technoblade’s jaw snapped shut. He glowered at the three time travelers, hands curling and uncurling into fists.

“We can’t give Dream any chance to escape,” Ran reminded him quietly.

Technoblade’s teeth clenched. Finally, he acknowledged their point with a stilted dip of his head.

“One more thing.” Purpled pinned the crowd with a blank stare. “If any of you mess this rescue operation up, I’ll kill you myself. Understood?”

A collective shiver ran through the assembled fighters. “Y-yeah,” Tubbo croaked from within the crowd.

Purpled nodded - one sharp jerk of his chin - and turned on his heel. Both he and Underscore held a hand out to Ran, who accepted them, shut his eyes in concentration, and *yanked*.

They stumbled into the far end of the corridor that would eventually become a sickening trophy room for everything the inhabitants of the server held dear. The frames and pens lining the walls were empty but labeled with what they would have contained - a haunting portrait of future possibilities.

“He’s here,” Ran whispered.

Underscore strained his ears. He couldn’t hear anything. “Where?” Purpled hissed.

Ran closed his eyes and canted his head, one inhuman ear flicking a millimeter upwards. Slowly, he reached out and shuffled forward, past the item frames and Henry’s pen, turning this way and that until his fingers met the wall. He looked back at his fellow time travelers and beckoned. They approached.

Here, Ran mouthed, running his fingers over the seam in the wall neither had previously noticed.

Impulsively, Underscore pressed his ear to it. Tommy’s voice trickled through the cracks, muffled but taut with pain and fear. Underscore waved the other two back, wound back his pickaxe, and *struck*. The hidden door wrenched apart with a scream of twisted metal, revealing Dream - and Tommy, lying prone at his feet.

Dream didn’t even get a chance to turn around.

Purpled’s dagger flew true, spearing him through the heart. Ran’s sword followed a moment later, sinking into his abdomen. Underscore’s axe completed the finale, slicing an elegant arc through the air - and Dream’s neck.

Dream disappeared in a puff of smoke.

“He’s respawning,” Underscore said, but before the words were out of his mouth, Ran had already grabbed ahold of Purpled’s shoulder and spirited them both away in a shower of purple particles. “Oh. Okay then.”

He turned to Tommy, who gaped up at him. “Hi, Tommy.”

“U-*Underscore*?”

“Yeah.” Underscore cracked a crooked smile. “It’s good to finally meet you face to face.”

“Wh-- how--”

“Questions later. Let’s get you out of here first.” Underscore knelt, digging through the pile of items Dream had left behind upon his death and coming up with a key. “Here we go.”

He unlocked Tommy’s manacles, then gently pried them away. Tommy stared at him the entire time, not even wincing when the metal peeled away from bloodied skin. “You’re-- you’re *here*?”

“I’m here,” Underscore agreed.

Tommy burst into tears. Underscore swept him into a hug without a second thought, ignoring the way his heart *lurched* at the several streaks of white now running through Tommy’s hair.

“You’re h-h-*here*, ” the teenager choked out, shaking with the force of his blinding relief. “You’re here, you’re here, he didn’t-- he didn’t kill you--”

Underscore tightened his grip. “He can’t kill us,” he promised Tommy, “and he never will. Ran and Purpled are going to kill him. He’s *never* going to touch you again.”

Tommy went stock-still. “Th-they’re. . . going to kill him?”

“Yep. All three lives.”

Tommy pulled back from the hug to peer at him with exhausted bewilderment. “But. . . he’s got the revival book.”

“That doesn’t matter,” Underscore said. “It only causes trouble in the future if he’s left alive.”

“But. . . but. . . can’t he. . . revive himself? He’ll just. . . bring himself back after you kill him-- won’t he?”

Underscore released a sharp bark of laughter, then immediately felt bad when Tommy flinched. He pulled him back into the hug and rubbed his back in a motion reminiscent of the way he’d comforted his own Tommy after nightmares. “Sorry, sorry. Tommy, he *can’t* bring himself back. If he could, he wouldn’t be so terrified of dying all the time. Why do you think he was-- *experimenting* with it?”

Tommy’s grip on Underscore’s shirt spasmed, and for a moment Underscore was terrified that the last comment had been a misstep. But Tommy just asked, “Experimenting?”

“Mhm. He was trying to figure out the revive book by. . . by using you.”

Tommy was silent for a moment. When he finally spoke, his voice was a mere wisp of its usual self. “Then. . . he wasn’t doing it to-- to ‘fix’ me?”

Underscore slammed his eyes shut against the sheer incandescent *rage* that flooded him. For several long seconds, he struggled to breathe, clamping his jaw shut so the expletives piling behind his tongue wouldn’t spill out. That fucking *Primes-damned son of a--*

Tommy was still trembling. The rational, logical part of Underscore’s mind reminded him that he needed to answer Tommy calmly, because Tommy would take any indication of violence badly but would also likely take the silence even worse. So Underscore tucked away his boiling fury to be released at a later date, then pushed as much *vehement sincerity* into his next words as he could. “No, Tommy. He was doing it for selfish gain. To gain more *knowledge*, pursue immortality - whatever messed-up goal he had, it was *entirely self-serving*. You don’t *need* to be fixed. You’re perfect the way you are, Tommy. What he did was *torture*, not fixing. You didn’t deserve it. You didn’t deserve *any* of it.”

“Oh,” Tommy whispered. And then he dissolved back into sobbing.

They were ugly cries. Most of the tears had long since run out due to Dream’s failure to hydrate his test subject properly, so Tommy just pressed his face into Underscore’s shoulder and *shook*. He started out with quiet, hitching breaths, then grew progressively louder until he was outright *howling*, incoherent curses blending into demands of “*why?*”. Underscore held him through it all, grounding him as best as he could and not complaining when Tommy’s grip grew tight enough to leave bruises.

Finally, *finally*, when Tommy had screamed himself hoarse and his trembling had devolved into exhausted stillness interspersed with the occasional tremor, Underscore shifted. “Sleep,” he murmured. “We’ll keep you safe.”

Tommy didn’t reply, but a moment later, his breathing evened out into the familiar patterns of unconsciousness. Underscore took a moment to just *breathe* with him, reminding himself that Tommy was alive and safe and *whole*.

When he was sure he wouldn’t shake apart, Underscore rose to his feet. Tommy was painfully light in his arms - even after months under Technoblade’s care, he hadn’t quite regained the weight he’d lost in exile. With ponderous steps, he exited the cell and made his way down the hall.

The first thing he noticed as he entered the central chamber was the deafening *silence*. His eyes were instantly drawn to the crowd-- and the green-clad man crouched like a cornered animal in the middle of it.

“Why,” said Underscore, “is he still alive?”

Purpled, standing at the center with his sword at Dream’s neck, jerked his head in the direction of Tommy’s cell. “The door was down, no soundproofing. We were. . . distracted before we could kill him a third time.”

Underscore's gaze swept across the army. More than one person was staring at Tommy's sleeping form, their faces pale.

"We could leave him for Tommy to kill," Ran offered from his place on the fringes of the crowd. "But that's. . . not a great idea."

Indeed it was not, because this Tommy was significantly more traumatized than the other Tommy had been when he first killed Dream. In fact, it was probably best to get Tommy out as quickly as possible.

Calmly, Underscore turned to Ran. "Take him."

Ran understood. He approached and carefully scooped Tommy from Underscore's arms, then tipped his head in a quick nod. "We'll be at Technoblade's. Message me when you're finished."

He disappeared in a shower of purple particles. Dream made a noise in the back of his throat, then froze when Purpled's sword drifted dangerously close to his larynx.

Now Tommy-free, Underscore slipped through the crowd and came to a stop at his fellow time-traveler's side. He stared silently at Dream, then raised his head and met Purpled's eyes. "He doesn't deserve a quick death."

Purpled stared back, gaze flat. "We don't torture people, Underscore."

"He doesn't deserve a quick death," Underscore repeated. "You don't *understand*, Purpled--"

"I heard him screaming," Purpled said placidly. "We *all* did. I understand. But *we don't torture*."

Underscore ground his teeth. The wet patch soaked into the shoulder of his jacket *burned* against his skin. "I want him to *suffer*."

"Then take away what he loves most. Life."

Underscore opened his mouth to protest, but movement in his peripheral vision caught his eye. Tubbo stepped out of the crowd, face pale but grim. He reached into his inventory and pulled out the Axe of Peace, flipped it around in his hands, and presented it to Underscore. "Take it."

Underscore stared at him. "What?"

Tubbo met his gaze. "Take it. Kill him."

Slowly, Underscore reached out and took the Axe of Peace. There was dried blood on the handle - Tommy's blood. He ran his thumb over it, gut lurching as it flaked under his finger.

". . . Thank you," he said to his younger self. Tubbo nodded, turned, and retreated back into the crowd.

Purpled eyed him, then lowered his sword from Dream's throat and stepped back. "All yours."

Dream was already scrambling away, wild stare fixed on Tubbo with the intensity of a hunted thing. "Tubbo. Tubbo, we can talk about this. You don't have to kill me."

Underscore stalked forward. He made no reply.

"I can bring people back to life! If you kill me--"

"Your revival powers cause nothing but *trouble* in the future," Underscore snarled. He stepped closer. Dream scrambled back, only to hit the wall.

True panic was setting in, the realization that he had no more bargaining chips - no way out of this. Dream had gone too far this time, played too close to the fire, and now he was facing the consequences. The man clearly realized it, because his voice went all high and breathy, finally losing his last bit of control in the face of mortal terror. "We can talk about this! I'll bring back whoever you want just don't kill me--"

Underscore crossed the last few feet between them and slammed a boot into Dream's chest. The man's ribs creaked dangerously as he cried out, flailing like a pinned bug. Underscore took a deep breath, set his shoulders, and reared back to deliver the killing blow. Dream screamed, flinging out a hand as though he could stop Underscore through sheer desperation. "*Waitwaitwait!*"

Underscore did not wait. "This is for Tommy, you fucker."

The Axe of Peace came down. Dream was no more.

so the story closes

Chapter Summary

The Aftermath, featuring fluff...and crying. A lot of crying.

Chapter Notes

As an early birthday present to myself, I am finishing this fic. (;v;)

Apologies for not replying to comments on the last chapter—but I read every one and I'd like to thank you all for the amount of cheering at Dream's death :D

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“How’s he doing?”

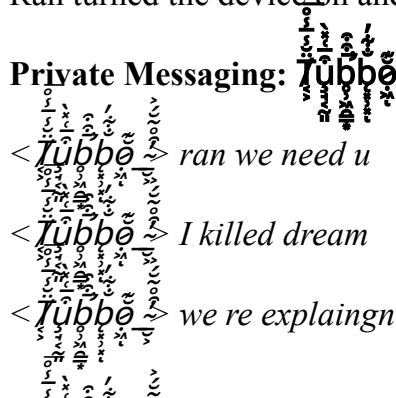
Philza’s voice was hushed. Ran looked up from where he was crammed into a much-too-small chair at Tommy’s bedside, gaze automatically skittering to the space between Philza’s eyes. “I splashed him with some potions,” he murmured hoarsely. “I don’t—I don’t know if I should give him a Weakness, too, to help him sleep...”

Tommy lay on the bed, eyes closed but brow furrowed. Every so often, he’d shift beneath his blankets and toss his head this way and that—a sure sign of nightmares. Philza examined him, pursing his lips, then shook his head. “Nah, Weakness won’t stop the nightmare—just make sure he can’t wake up. ‘Sides, his body needs the energy to recover.”

Ran’s reply was interrupted by the low buzz of his communicator. He sent an apologetic look towards Philza as he pulled it out, but the avian waved him off. “Are they alright?” he whispered.

Ran turned the device on and was instantly bombarded with messages.

Private Messaging:


<Tubbe> ran we need u
<Tubbe> I killed dream
<Tubbe> we re explaingn

<Tubbe> now they wan to fight the egg
<Tubbe> come back to dreams base so we can regroup
<Tubbe> be ready to tp out

Ran typed out an ‘omw’ and stowed the communicator away. “Dream is dead,” he whispered to Philza. “Message Technoblade and tell him to head back here.”

Philza arched an eyebrow. “You’re not staying?”

“We have one more thing we need to do before we come back. I, uh, they need me to—teleport them. Out. But we *will* come back. Promise.”

“I’m holding you to that,” said Philza. His tone was light, but the look in his eye was anything but. “Be safe out there.”

“We will,” Ran promised hoarsely. With one last glance towards Tommy, he gathered all his focus, directed it to Dream’s base, and *jumped*.

Underscore didn’t flinch at the *vwoop* of an enderman behind him. The crowd in front of them, however, startled violently, some going so far as to raise their weapons.

“Hi?” Ran asked, voice pitching up in question. “What’s going on?”

“Just told them a giant red egg ate our world,” Purpled drawled, “and now they want to help us kill it. We’re trying to explain why that’s a bad idea.”

“Ah,” said Ran. Underscore gritted his teeth and took another deep breath. Ostensibly, everything was okay now. Dream was dead. Tommy was safely sequestered in Technoblade’s house, guarded by Philza. Ran and Purpled—*his* Purpled—were at his side, forming a solid defense.

And yet every one of his nerves was alight with the need to *move*, to get things done. Instead, he was stuck here, trying to convince a crowd of confused Players to leave him alone and *let him do his damn job*.

Fundy spoke up. “You wanted our help with Dream—”

“We asked for *help* because Dream could’ve *escaped us*,” Underscore hissed. “The Egg is a *stationary target*, and all of you are risks we *can’t afford*.”

Fundy puffed up, gearing up to argue, but Purpled—clearly done with the entire situation—forestalled his outburst with a single word. “Possessed.”

Fundy blinked. “What?”

“Possessed,” Purpled repeated, pointing at him. His finger shifted to Puffy, standing to Fundy’s right. “Also possessed. Possessed. Eaten by the Egg. Possessed. Beheaded, then eaten by the Egg. Stabbed to death and eaten by the Egg, possessed, possessed, disappeared and we never found the body so probably eaten, possessed—do you get the point?”

By now, he’d pointed at a good number of people. The various pale faces staring back at him told him that they did, indeed, get the point.

“You’re liabilities,” Underscore told them. “You’ve never fought the Crimson before. We know how to handle this. Just stay out of it.”

“You’re *kids*,” Sam said. “It shouldn’t be your responsibility.”

Underscore cackled, sharp and edged with bitterness. “Oh, Sam. We haven’t been kids in a *long* time.”

The hum of the portal at their back abruptly spiked. “Let them handle this,” someone grunted from behind them. Underscore’s eyes snapped to the speaker, going wide with surprise when he saw *Technoblade* stepping up beside them. “They know what they’re doin’. There’s a world-ending threat they need to take care of—our questions can wait.”

“Exactly,” Underscore muttered. “Just—give us three hours. We’ll destroy it and get back to you, you can ask your questions then.”

Still, Sam hesitated. “But—”

“This is taking too long,” Purpled interrupted. “Ran?”

Ran clamped a hand down on each of their shoulders. Before anyone could react, they were gone.

Their first stop, of course, was Church Prime.

“These are so *simple*,” Underscore muttered, turning a hazmat helmet over in his hands. “I don’t know if we can find an enchanter nearby, but—”

“They don’t need to be that strong,” Ran reminded him. “The Crimson isn’t that powerful right now.”

Underscore grimaced. “But—”

“We’re on a time limit,” Purpled cut in, words harsh but tinged with understanding. “We have the stuff we need—it’s good enough.”

Underscore, though still hesitant, capitulated to his point with a nod and shoved the helmet over his head. It sealed into place with a distinct *click-hsssss*.

“Right,” he said. “Let’s go make some omelets.”

In the end, it was almost insultingly simple. A bit of digging, an approximate fuckton of Technoblade's 'borrowed' TNT, and one very big explosion later, the threat was gone.

The threat of the Eggpocalypse was gone. Their entire terrible future was *gone*.

“That was too easy,” Underscore said, staring at the smoking crater in the center of the cavern. The pillars they’d put up to prevent a cave-in were thankfully untouched. “It *can’t* be that easy.”

“I think it is,” Ran murmured, eyeing the withered, formerly-crimson flora near his boots. They were rapidly disintegrating into ash. “Just like that.”

“Just like that,” Underscore echoed. “All those deaths. All those years in hiding. All of it could’ve been prevented *just like that*. ”

“Yeah,” said Purpled. “It’s pretty fucked up, huh?”

Underscore started giggling. It soon spiraled into full-blown, gut-wrenching laughter, loud and quick and threaded with hysteria. Wordlessly, Purpled hooked a hand under his arm and guided him to the ground, where he continued to cackle. Somewhere between Purpled sitting down beside him and Ran wrapping his arms around Underscore’s shoulders, that laughter turned into sobbing.

“I know,” Ran whispered. Steam hissed from his face as tears dripped onto Underscore's shoulder. “I know, Tubbo. It’s okay now.”

“It’s so *f-fucking stupid*,” Underscore gasped out as another delirious cackle wrenched itself free. “All that—*so easily*—but they’re all still—*gone*—”

Purpled placed a hand on his shoulder in silent solidarity. They remained like that, one howling out his pain to the world while the other two mourned in silence for the sheer *unfairness* of it all, the lives lost and the future that would never be. They mourned, and they broke, and they healed.

Eventually, Underscore’s sobs tapered off. Their torches had burned out. The shadows wrapped around them like a comforting embrace, accompanied by the smell of ash. In the darkness, Underscore shifted under his friends’ grasp and cleared his throat. “Well,” he croaked. “That was. Something.”

“It was definitely *something*,” Ran agreed, his own voice hoarse. “...Everyone feel better?”

“Kinda,” said Underscore. Purpled grunted an affirmative as the hand on Tubbo’s shoulder disappeared. Ran followed suit, releasing Underscore from the hug.

For several seconds, the only sound was the shuffling of cloth against stone. A moment later, a torch lit up—causing all three Players to flinch away from the light. Purpled was the first to recover, having been the one to light the torch. He peered at the other two. “...You both look like shit.”

“I *feel* like shit,” Underscore groaned. “Urgh. My face feels disgusting.”

“Here,” Purpled said, holding out a rag. Underscore took it and began wiping the tears and snot from his face. Ran accepted the next rag and pulled out a bit of Healing from his inventory to take care of the burns on his face. Purpled waited as the two of them made themselves more presentable.

When they’d all somewhat cleaned up, Underscore cleared his throat. “So. What now?”

“Well,” said Purpled, “we can go live in the woods and build a nice life away from everyone else. Or we can go back to Dream’s base and let people know we’ve killed the Egg. Or...we can go to Technoblade’s and see how Tommy’s doing. Personally, I prefer the third option, but—”

“Tommy,” Ran and Underscore said in unison.

“Back to Tommy it is, then.” Purpled snorted. “We got our own bodies back, and we *still* can’t leave him alone.”

“He won’t get rid of us that easily,” Underscore said. His voice was still nasally, but his eyes were bright. “We’re like parasites. Leeches. We’ll follow him to the ends of the earth.”

Ran cracked a smile. It was small, tired—and painfully genuine. “Let’s go home.”

He held out his hands. Without hesitation, the other two took them.

A moment later, the cavern was empty. All that was left behind was rubble, smoke, and the faint, ashy imprint of a parasite’s remains.

Tommy awoke to *warmth*.

He laid there for a moment, content to float in the peaceful silence. Gradually, his ears adjusted to the background noise—the muffled chirping of birds and rustling of leaves, and the much closer sound of three people breathing.

One of those people was him. The second was snoring. And the third was even, measured—

Tommy peeled his eyes open, squinting as dappled sunlight met his crusted eyelids. The first thing he saw was a blur of forest-green and brown.

Tubbo.

"Finally awake?"

Tommy blinked the last of the blurriness from his vision. Purpled, seated in the chair beside the dozing Tubbo, smirked at him and tipped his head.

"Welcome back."

"What the fuck?" Tommy said. Or, tried to say. All that came out was a mangled croak.

"Right. Water." Purpled disappeared from his field of vision and reappeared a moment later with a bottle of water in hand. "Need help sitting up?"

Tommy pushed himself up into a sitting position. Purpled waited until he was settled, then uncorked the bottle and lifted it to Tommy's mouth. The moment the water touched his lips, he realized how thirsty he was. Within moments, he'd drained the entire thing. Purpled pulled out another bottle.

When he'd slowed down enough to take periodic sips, Purpled handed him the bottle and sat back down. "So," he said, "how are you feeling?"

"Like shit." Tommy set the bottle down on his lap and glanced at Tubbo. "What... happened?"

There was a pause. Purpled shifted in his chair. Finally, he said, "Dream is dead. Underscore killed him."

Tommy was very glad he hadn't kept drinking water, because he definitely would have choked. "*What?*"

"Dream is *dead*," Purpled enunciated. "All three lives. We got the entire server together to take him out. Ran took you back to Technoblade's after you passed out—we've all been waiting here for you to wake up."

"No, wait, go back—Dream is *dead*?"

"Yes."

"*Dead* -dead?"

"Extremely dead. Underscore took his head off. We have the body to prove it."

"But are you...*sure* he's dead?" Tommy's voice grew quieter, more fragile. "You're sure he won't—can't come back?"

“We’re sure,” Purpled said firmly. “He never figured out how to use the revival book on himself, even in the future.”

“Oh.” To his horror, Tommy found tears welling up in his own eyes. “He’s really—gone?”

“Yes, Tommy. He won’t hurt you again. Ever.”

Tommy took in a shuddering breath. Then another. And another. All he could see was Dream looming over him—all-powerful, seemingly undefeatable, the man who had tormented him for so long.

Gone.

It seemed impossible.

“It’s okay if you don’t believe me right away,” Purpled said. “It’ll take a while for it to settle in. Just focus on recovering right now.”

Tommy nodded mutely. At that moment, Tubbo groaned and raised his head, blinking blearily. “Purpled?” he mumbled, rubbing sleep from his eyes. “Did’ja say something?”

“Tommy’s awake,” said Purpled.

Tubbo’s head snapped around. Tommy offered a wave, unable to muster his usual smile but happy all the same to see Tubbo. “Hey, Tubso. Long time no see.”

Tubbo’s face went through a series of violent contortions, settled into blank stillness for all of three seconds—and then he launched himself at Tommy. Tommy yelped, scrambling back, only to find himself being crushed in a hug. Tubbo’s hair brushed across Tommy’s cheek as he buried his face in Tommy’s shoulder and took a deep, shuddering breath.

“Uh,” said Tommy. There was a lump in his throat. “Tubbo?”

Purpled quietly excused himself and slipped out of the room, leaving just the two of them. The moment the door clicked shut behind him, Tubbo began to shake.

“Tubbo?” Tommy asked again, because Tubbo hadn’t exhaled yet. “You gotta breathe, man, holding your breath isn’t good for you.”

Tubbo’s shaking intensified. Tommy swallowed and brought up an arm to lightly pat his friend (?) on the back. Tubbo shuddered at the touch, made a quiet, broken sound, and tightened his hold on Tommy. Tommy felt something warm soaking into the collar of his shirt and—

Oh.

“Hey,” he said, shifting his weight so he could bring his other arm up and wrap both of them around Tubbo. “It’s okay. I forgive you.”

Tubbo made a strangled, high-pitched noise at the back of his throat. His fingernails dug into Tommy's back, bunching up the fabric of his shirt into two fistfuls. He shook his head from side to side, smearing more tears against Tommy's shoulder. Tommy blinked furiously, but he couldn't smother the burning in his own eyes.

"I forgive you, Tubbo," he said. "I'm—I understand now. I'm glad you're here."

Tubbo *broke*. A terrible, aching sob tore free from his throat. "I'm *sorry*," he wailed, rocking into Tommy with enough force to knock both of them into the wall. "I'm sorry, I'm so sorry, Tommy, I'm sorry—"

"No, fuck, Tubs—stop—"

"*I'm so so-o-orry!*" Tubbo's voice cracked apart. "I was—I shouldn't've—oh, *Prime*, Tommy—he—you—*exile*—"

"Shhh—it's okay—"

"It's *not* aha-ha-hand you won't even let me apo—*hic*—ligize just *let me*—"

"Tubbo—"

"*NO!*" Tubbo snarled, loud enough to stun Tommy into momentary silence. He immediately crumpled. "No, that's—" he sniffled, "*Sorry*—I just—he—he was right—"

Tommy frowned, even as he kept rubbing soothing circles into Tubbo's back. "Who?"

Tubbo fell still. His shoulders shook, evened out, and then Tubbo took a deep breath and pressed his face further against Tommy's shoulder. "Old me," he mumbled.

"...Underscore?" Tommy suddenly realized what Tubbo meant. "Oh, no—Tubbo, that wasn't —"

"It *was*," Tubbo snapped, abruptly pulling away to glower at Tommy with red-rimmed eyes. "He was right, Tommy—I could've—I should've tried harder—"

"Tubbo, *no*. Underscore—he's from the future, you know that shit about hindsight being twenty-twenty. He didn't think of it at the time, he shouldn't've expected you to—he was pissed at himself and he took it out on you—"

"But I still should've *tried!* You—in exile, Dream—"

"What that bastard did *isn't your fault*, Tubs. That was all him, you hear me? That wasn't—"

"It *was*. I betrayed you."

Tommy hesitated. "...You did," he finally said, but rushed on when a savage, almost *vindictive* gleam appeared in Tubbo's eyes, "but the bastard *made* you. He didn't give you any way out—"

“I could’ve done *more*,” Tubbo seethed, all self-loathing and rage. “I *should*’ve done more, Tommy, should’ve tried harder—”

“He’d have killed you.” Even as he said it, Tommy knew it was the truth. “If you tried, Tubbo, he’d have killed you.”

“Then I should’ve *let him*— ”

“*Tubbo*,” Tommy interrupted, trapping Tubbo’s head between his hands and forcing him to look up at him, “He would’ve killed you, and then he’d have destroyed L’Manberg. It wasn’t fair. Nothing he did was fair. He would’ve figured out some way to get at me even if you said no. None of this was *your fault*.”

“But—”

“Would you have visited me if he hadn’t told you I didn’t want to see you?” Tubbo tried to look away, but Tommy kept his head firmly in place. “Would you have?”

“Yes,” Tubbo muttered reluctantly.

“Did you ask him to hurt me?”

“*No!*” Tubbo recoiled, nearly going white with horror. “No, Tommy, never—”

“Then why the fuck are you being so guilty?”

“Because I still *let him do it!*” Tubbo screamed, wrenching free of Tommy’s grasp with enough force to send his chair skittering back. “Because I couldn’t *protect you* and I was *weak* and I *went along with him!* Because I didn’t stick to the plan and I let him walk all over me and then he hurt you and you came back from Exile with—with *voices* and he did that, and I let him do that, and I couldn’t *stop him!*”

Tommy wordlessly kicked his blankets away and climbed off the bed to wrap Tubbo in another hug. Tubbo sobbed and beat weakly at his chest, trying to push him away. The longer Tommy held on, though, the more he crumpled into the hug. His sobs grew quieter, the harsh edges softening into hitched breathing.

“Why?” he finally croaked. His voice was brittle and hardly above a whisper. “Why aren’t you *mad at me?*”

“Cause you don’t deserve that, Tubbo,” Tommy said quietly. He hugged Tubbo a little tighter. Slowly, Tubbo reached up and reciprocated the hug.

“I’m sorry,” he said again.

“I forgive you,” said Tommy. “I’m just—I’m happy you’re here, Tubbo. Please. We both made it out alive, and the bastard is dead. That’s—okay, that’s not *all* that matters, but it’s the most important, innit?”

Tubbo was quiet for a long moment. Tommy felt him let out a long, calming breath. “Yeah,” he whispered at last, a wobbly, genuine smile audible in the lilt of his voice. “That’s pretty important.”

Tommy nodded. “We’re going to be okay, Tubbo. Things have fucking *sucked* up ‘til now, but they’re going to get better. Got it?”

“Got it,” Tubbo murmured. The smile sounded wider. “...I’m glad you’re alive, Tommy.”

“I’m glad I’m alive too.” Tommy squeezed Tubbo one last time, then drew back. “Good?”

“All good,” Tubbo confirmed, wiping snot off his face with the back of his sleeve. He sniffled loudly. “...Thanks.”

“Don’t mention it, Tubbo.” Tommy hastily swiped away a few of his own rogue tears that had managed to wiggle free. “Seriously. Don’t mention it, my image can’t take it—”

Tubbo snorted. “Your secret’s safe with me, bossman. Promise.”

They nodded solemnly at each other, then broke into impromptu giggles. It was the kind of laughter that was happy in a raw, exhausted sort of way—laughter that followed the worst of the worst, laughter that followed the relief of a burden long carried. As Tommy leaned into his friend, he felt something deep behind his ribcage unspool and bloom into warmth.

Yeah, they were going to be okay.

The first month after Dream’s death was...chaotic.

There were questions. A lot of them. The rushed account of the future they’d provided at the Community House had only informed the rest of the server about the Egg, and pretty much nothing else. On top of that, Underscore had promised to answer questions later—which meant that the three time travelers spent a good chunk of time—when they weren’t taking care of Tommy or fielding visits from the select few who had been entrusted with the location of Technoblade’s house—glued to their comms and typing out lengthy, complicated explanations. Along with warnings for certain individuals, because those were definitely needed.

In addition to fielding questions, though, there were negotiations and transfers of power to oversee. Dream’s death had consequences—namely in that several key players in the SMP suddenly found themselves much more willing to try for peace. Not only had one of the biggest war-hungry wildcards been removed, the story of the war-torn future the time travelers told had been rather...frightening.

One of these negotiations was the relationship between L’Manberg and the Antarctic Commune. There was, of course, a lot of bad blood between the two—which meant that one

of Underscore's top priorities was to create some sort of compromise.

In the end, L'Manberg was turned into a commune, both parties made public (if somewhat begrudging) apologies to each other, and parted ways with a better understanding of (if not agreement with) the other's philosophies. Now that the country was no longer under rule of an *official* government and the members of the Butcher Army had apologized (with Tommy's intercession) for trying to execute him, Technoblade had no reason to bomb it to smithereens. Philza was still... *displeased* about what happened with Wilbur, but a lengthy conversation with Underscore and Technoblade eventually helped him come to terms with the fact that the country was not to blame for his son's death. Things settled much more nicely after that, with L'Manberg's citizens slowly relaxing now that no one else seemed to hold a grudge against them. The last vestiges of the walls Dream had built were torn down, and visitors were now openly welcomed into the commune—leading to new friendships.

Meanwhile, the three time travelers, refusing to be separated from Tommy, ended up building a house in Technoblade's (metaphorical) backyard. It was...an *interesting* house, to say the least, with an eclectic mix of architectural styles, materials, and an interior that seemed bigger than the exterior. Technoblade grumbled about "eyesores" and "property value", but he never actually told them to build somewhere else. Nor did he complain about the frequent sleepovers the three had in Tommy's room. Sleepovers meant less night terrors, which meant less panic over being woken up in the middle of the night by Tommy's screams. Technoblade valued his sleep, okay? That was all there was to it.

As for Tommy...well. Tommy thought he might finally be really, actually happy. He could wake up in the morning and go about his day without the sense of ever-present dread that had loomed over him for so long. He had friends to talk to and a puppy whose fur he could cry into on the Bad Days. He could go where he wanted, talk to whoever he wanted, do whatever he wanted—and he basked in that freedom.

Tommy was happy. And that, in itself, made the entire mess worth it.

Tommy stumbled into the kitchen, yawning. He fumbled his way to the shelves, fished out a loaf of bread, turned around—and froze.

He blinked. Rubbed his eyes. Looked at the sight before him and blinked again.

"What the fuck?" he finally said.

"Mornin'," Technoblade greeted.

"Morning," Tubbo chirped.

Tommy looked between the two of them, then pinched himself. The sharp pain assured him that no, he was not dreaming.

“...What the fuck?” he repeated.

Technoblade took a sip of his tea—*fucking tea*— to hide the smirk on his lips. “Don’t see what’s confusin’ you, Tommy. Something wrong?”

“Why is *Tubbo* in your house?”

Technoblade and Tubbo exchanged glances. “We’re just having tea together,” Technoblade said. “Is that a crime?”

Tommy pointed at him. “What happened to hating L’Manberg and everything it stood for?”

“I just didn’t like the government,” Technoblade grunted. “L’Manberg no longer has one. Not my problem anymore.”

Tommy stared at him, then at Tubbo. “...You’re. Having tea together now.”

“We’ve found some...common interests,” Technoblade hedged. “Tubbo’s a good conversation partner.”

“Damn right I am.”

“So you’re just—not going to war anymore?” Tommy checked. “Not gonna try and raze L’Manberg to the ground?”

“Nope.”

Tommy floundered, grasping for some resemblance of the status quo. “...But what about the dogs?”

“Dogs?” Tubbo asked.

Technoblade frowned. “Right. The dogs. I don’t have the resources for takin’ care of them long-term, ‘specially not the hound army under L’Manberg—”

“The *what?*”

“Part of my invasion plan.” Technoblade waved it off, ignoring the way Tubbo's eyebrows slowly climbed up his forehead. “Not that I need an invasion plan anymore. So I don’t need a hound army. Can’t take care of them all. *Sooooo*... uh...is anyone in L’Manberg allergic to dogs?”

“You just *let them out?*”

“Yep.”

Tommy stared down at L'Manberg, caught between shock and some unnameable *warm-soft-light* feeling in his chest. The nation was completely overrun with wolves—very big, fluffy, and *happy* wolves. Several citizens were quickly buried under large cuddle piles—and not one of them was protesting.

“What the fuck, Technoblade,” he said.

Technoblade shrugged, his lips quirking to one side. “The whole ‘attack-turned-emotional-support-dog’ thing worked for you, didn’t it?”

“Argos didn’t finish his attack dog training!”

“The hounds *are* trained to be friendly towards humans, Tommy. They only attack if I direct them to attack. Otherwise they’re perfectly normal dogs.”

A small wolf dashed away from the milling crowd, followed by a puppy sporting a distinctive red collar.

“Looks like Argos has a friend,” Technoblade remarked. “Phil’ll be happy to hear that. He’s gotten *attached*. Him and his paternal instincts, I *swear*...”

In the grass down below, Argos dived at his new friend. The two soon engaged in a play-fight, tumbling headlong over each other until they crashed straight into another puppy—who promptly joined the clash. They tussled right into a nearby mud puddle.

“I’m gonna have to wash him,” Tommy complained.

“What a tragedy,” Technoblade deadpanned. His monotone voice was betrayed by the way one corner of his mouth pulled upwards. “It’s almost like you signed up for the responsibility.”

“Fuck you.”

Technoblade ignored that with the grace of a man well-versed in Tommy-wrangling. “Hey, at least our work’s bein’ put to good use. ‘Sides, if anyone *tries* anythin’ funny, I’ll still have a backup plan.”

Looking at the mess of friendly dogs and happy humans below him, Tommy couldn’t find it in himself to protest.

Purpled stared at Purpled. One Purpled narrowed his eye. The other raised his chin, crossed his arms, and took a breath.

“I’ll be ‘Purp’ and you can be ‘led’,” he bargained.

“And be called something that sounds like ‘old’ every day? Nice try, but *no*.”

“You *are* old.”

The elder Purpled’s eye narrowed further. “You want to repeat that?”

“You. Are. Old.” The younger Purpled raised both of his eyebrows in clear challenge. (Un)fortunately, Purpled had only grown more mature with time, and didn’t rise to the bait.

“Look, kid—”

“Don’t call me that.”

“—mini-me, I’ve been Purpled longer than you have. I get name rights.”

“If you’ve been Purpled longer, then you should know why I don’t want to give my name up.”

The elder Purpled’s lips thinned. He did. Their name was one of the first choices they’d ever been allowed to make themselves—deciding who they wanted to be. The name carried memories of blood and death and victory and loss and laughter and—most importantly—*perseverance*. It was a badge of pride, of strength, a declaration that they’d gone through hell and made it out the other side. To give it up was to spit in the face of everything they’d sworn upon when they made their choice.

“...How about this,” he said, “We both stay Purpled, but when we’re with other people, they can call me ‘Purp’. Or Wars, maybe, from our last name. I’m just...more used to nicknames.”

The younger Purpled’s jaw tensed. “Your friends called you ‘Purp’?”

“Tommy—my Tommy did. Mostly to piss me off.” The younger Purpled’s eyebrows climbed an inch up his forehead. The elder Purpled—now dubbed Wars—snorted. “Hated that stupid nickname. It grew on me, though.”

“Mm. So you were...actually friends. With Tommy.”

Wars made to reply, only to pause and examine his younger counterpart. “...What are you actually asking?”

Younger-Purpled grimaced. “How did you—uh—become *friends* with them?”

“Well, spending time with them helped. Not like there was much privacy in our bunker, anyway. And they helped me out, free of charge.” Wars wiggled his netherite leg. “Tubbo designed the first prototype for this, actually. Then we made this one together after he taught me some redstone. Ranboo made sure I started eating normally again. That was a whole—problem, back when I first, uh, joined them. And Tommy—Tommy taught me breathing exercises. Taught me how to ground myself when I started to spiral.”

Younger-Purpled would’ve looked unmoved to anyone else, but Wars knew his own tells. He could see the way the kid’s eyes briefly darted sideways and the subtle dip of his chin.

“And...they weren’t...”

“Keeping me around because I was useful?” At younger-Purpled’s jerky nod, he shook his head. “Nope. When they—rescued me, after—the events that led to *this*,” he shook his prosthetic again, “I was pretty much dead weight. Stayed dead weight for a good few months, actually. Spent most of the days lying in bed or limping around the house, woke everyone up with screaming at night, kept throwing up after eating, acted like an asshole whenever they helped me because I was scared—I was pretty much a drain on resources and patience. But they stayed. Took care of me. Helped me recover.”

“Long-term investment,” younger-Purpled argued.

“That’s weak, and you know it.” When his younger self remained silent, Wars sighed. “Look, give them a shot. My trust issues are just as bad as yours—maybe even *worse*, actually—and I’m vouching for them. Even if you don’t want friends—having allies can’t hurt.”

Younger-Purpled sighed. “...Fine. I’ll give it a shot. But if this goes badly—”

“You’ll shoot me in the knees,” Wars deadpanned. Younger-Purpled paused and did a double-take. Older-Purpled raised an eyebrow. “I’m you, remember?”

“...I’m not sure I like you,” Younger-Purpled said.

“That’s fine. Don’t like me. Doesn’t change the fact that I’m you.”

Younger-Purpled narrowed his eyes. Wars smirked and, lightning-quick, reached out to ruffle his younger self’s hair. “Give them a chance, mini-me. You’ll be surprised. Pleasantly surprised.”

Younger-Purpled glowered at him, then spun on his heel and stalked off. Wars’ smirk softened as he watched him go.

Yeah, younger-Purpled would be just fine. If he wasn’t happily gallivanting around with Tommy, Tubbo and Ranboo within the month, Purpled would eat his prosthetic. Without seasoning.

“So what’s the occasion?”

“Oh, y’know—” Tubbo shrugged. “Just wanted to talk to my future self, learn some things, you know how it is.”

Ranboo shuffled awkwardly. “...Why am I here?”

“We...ended on a bad note last time.” Tubbo grimaced; his older self winced. “So, uh. I brought in the Ranboos. To make it less awkward!”

Ranboo turned to stare at Tubbo. “You—want *me* to make it less awkward. *Me*. ”

“You’re not as awkward as you think,” Ran cut in, drawing a startled flinch from his younger self. “Just—um—embrace your...weirder thoughts. It’ll help.”

Ranboo stared blankly at him. Ran deflated.

“It’ll make sense one day.”

“I corrupted him,” Underscore proclaimed, hooking one arm around Ran’s elbow and yanking him closer. Ran accepted the manhandling with longsuffering resignation. “Don’t let him fool you, he’s just as crazy as me.”

“Crazy?” Tubbo asked.

“Oh believe me, you’ll get *real* crazy in the future.” Underscore grinned, bright and wild. “You just gotta...loosen up from the whole ‘Mister President’ persona first, though. Losing L’Manberg and running off to live in the tundra to build nukes really helped with that!”

“Nukes?” Tubbo asked gleefully.

“*Nukes?*” Ranboo echoed with far less excitement.

“Nukes,” Underscore confirmed cheerily—right before Ran whacked him on the shoulder.

“No nukes,” he admonished. “Or any other kind of world-ending weaponry.”

“You’re no fun.”

“I’m fun. Safe, non-explosive fun.”

“No. Fun.”

Ran’s reply was cut off with a sharp inhale. Underscore, caught off guard by the abrupt end to their banter, glanced up at him.

Ran’s eyes had gone wide as saucers. He was staring intently at something further down the hallway. Underscore, confused by Ran’s odd behavior, followed his gaze—and similarly froze.

A zombie piglin toddler stared back at them, his one remaining eye wide with curiosity. He clutched a stuffed chicken to his chest.

“Oh!” Tubbo said. “Sorry, we forgot to tell you. This is Michael, our kid. Ranboo and I adopted him a week ago. He’s harmless, so, uh, don’t stab him or we’ll get very mad at you.”

Neither Ran nor Underscore gave any indication that they’d heard him.

“Um.” Ranboo’s eyes darted between them and the toddler. “You, uh, you okay?”

Underscore let out a soft, broken noise. Tubbo yelped as his older self jerked forward and all but *collapsed* to his knees, flinging his hands towards Michael—only to stop inches from the piglin’s shoulders and hover, shaking. The toddler flinched back, eye going wide. When it became apparent that Underscore was frozen in place, though, he let out a hesitant, inquisitive squeak.

“*Michael*,” Underscore choked out, and then he began *grunting*. Michael visibly brightened and squeaked fervently back. Tubbo gaped at his older self.

“Erm,” Ranboo said, “you know piglin?”

Underscore laughed even as a fresh wave of tears spilled from his eyes. “Phil spent some time with us in the bunker. He taught us piglin in case—in case we ran into Techno, ‘cause he thought it might reach him better and—”

He broke off and gathered Michael into a hug. The toddler accepted the affection with bewildered happiness.

“You...” Ranboo began hesitantly, trying to figure out how to approach the *clearly* sensitive subject, “you also...knew Michael?”

“We adopted him after L’Manberg was destroyed a second time,” Ran said. His eyes were fixed on Michael. “He...didn’t make it out when the Crimson reached Snowchester. Tubbo blamed himself for a long time.”

“Oh. That’s. I’m. I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be, it was a while ago and he’s—he’s here now. He’s alive. He’s okay.”

“He’s okay,” Underscore repeated, almost to himself. He pulled back so he could gently knock his forehead against Michael’s. “...You’re okay, Michael. You’re alive.”

The toddler frowned and grabbed at Underscore’s face, smushing his cheeks as he chattered unhappily. Underscore let out a wet laugh and answered in piglin.

“He’s asking why Underscore is crying,” Ran relayed to Tubbo and Ranboo. “He’s...he’s a good kid.”

“Yeah,” Ranboo murmured. “Yeah, he is.”

Underscore pulled away from Michael to gesture towards Ran, speaking quickly all the while. Michael looked towards Ran, curiosity shining in his eyes. Ran stepped forward and crouched down so he was closer to Michael’s level. “Hello,” he greeted, then repeated it in piglin. Michael *beamed*.

Tubbo and Ranboo waited patiently as their future selves met their son once again. Ran broke down crying, too, when Michael returned his hug. That set Underscore off again, which resulted in the three of them bundling up in a group hug and murmuring to each other in piglin. It was a while before Underscore and Ran could pull themselves away and begin composing themselves.

“Well,” said Tubbo, “how about that food?”

Underscore sniffled and scrubbed a sleeve over his red eyes. “Fuck yeah, food.”

“*Language!*” both Ranboos yelped, the older even going as far as to clap his hands over Michael’s ears. The toddler blinked up at him, confused.

Tubbo snorted. “Oh, he’s going to hear a lot worse when Tommy comes over.”

“I—” Ranboo paused, realized that he couldn’t refute that point, and switched angles. “That doesn’t mean we should curse in front of him! He’s a *toddler!*”

“He doesn’t even understand what we’re saying! He needs exposure to English to learn it!”

“His first word might be a curse!”

“Maybe! It’d be funny!”

Ranboo buried his face in his hands and groaned. He was distracted from his misery by a raspy chuckle. All eyes turned to Ran, who didn’t bother to wipe the fond smile off his face. “Thanks,” he said hoarsely. “For letting us meet him.”

“Yeah. Of course. Uh.”

“Wanna help us coparent him?” Tubbo blurted, apropos of nothing. He barrelled onward before either of their stunned older selves could reply. “I mean—you obviously already kinda know him, and you could maybe teach us piglin so we could talk to him or give us tips on how to care for him—”

“Yes,” both time travelers said, cutting off his rant. “That would be—really awesome,” Underscore continued, and everyone in the room pretended that his voice wasn’t cracking. “*Really* awesome.”

“Cool,” said Tubbo. “Okay.”

“Okay,” said Underscore.

“Okay.”

“Yup. Okay.”

Awkward silence stretched between the four of them, during which Michael looked curiously between them and *oinked* curiously.

“I’m...sorry about what I said,” said Underscore. “...Back at the Community House. That... that wasn’t fair of me.”

His younger self stared at him, round-eyed. Underscore grimaced and looked away.

“I might’ve been a...bit...upset. And I took it out on you. I think—I *know* it was Dream. Not you. It wasn’t your fault. I’m...sorry for yelling at you. And saying that shit. It isn’t true.”

“Oh,” said Tubbo. He blinked a few times and swallowed. “Oh, um. It’s. It’s okay. I... Tommy helped me understand that.” The corner of his mouth ticked upward. “Still don’t fully believe it, but...I’m getting there.”

“Good,” Underscore said.

“Good,” Tubbo echoed, then narrowed his eyes. “But *you* don’t believe that, do you?”

Now it was his older self’s turn to be bewildered. “Er—”

“You still think it was your fault. ‘ts why you blew up on me, isn’t it?”

Underscore opened and closed his mouth a few times, then deflated. “That...makes sense. I didn’t—realize...”

“Well now you do,” Tubbo said. He shrugged, and the other corner of his mouth twisted up into a wry smile. “Guess we both have some things to work through.”

“Guess we do,” Underscore agreed. He huffed and looked away. “Prime, there’s been too much emotion for one day. Can we do something that’s *not* going to make me talk about my feelings?”

Ran cleared his throat. “So, uh, food?”

Tubbo’s eyes blew wide. “The food!” he yelped, spinning on his heel and *sprinting* for the kitchen. “Shit, I left something on the stove—”

Ranboo hurtled after him with a cry of “*You left something on the stove?!’*”

Underscore snickered. Ran sent him an exasperated look, then reached down to swing Michael up into the air. The toddler squealed with delight as he was settled over the enderman hybrid’s shoulders. He prodded curiously at Ran’s horns, then peered over his head and down at the now much further-away ground. Underscore wiggled his fingers up at him; the toddler gladly reciprocated the wave and added a wide, beaming smile for good measure.

“Let’s go,” Ran said, keeping a firm hold on Michael’s knees as he stepped forward. Together, they followed the smell of smoke deeper into the house.

Tommy woke up fighting for air.

“Tommy!”

Tommy choked out something between a sob and a shriek, grabbing the hands that reached for him and clinging on for dear life. “Oh shit oh *shit*—”

“Breathe, Tommy. In, two, three, four—”

“Fuck your four seconds,” Tommy wheezed. His knuckles went white as he tightened his grip on Wars’ wrists. “*Fuck*—”

“—hold, two, three, Tommy. Come on. Copy me.” Wars gently pried one of his arms free and pressed Tommy’s hand to his chest. He exaggerated his inhales. “In...hold...out...”

Gradually, Tommy’s breathing slowed to match Wars’. He slumped into the time traveler’s side.

“You want to talk about it?” Wars asked quietly.

“T’s fuckin’ *stupid*,” Tommy grumbled. He scrubbed an arm across his eyes. “Dream’s dead an’ gone but I’m still *scared* of him. I keep seeing ‘im in my sleep and—just—*fuck*.”

“It’s okay to be scared of him—”

“—yeah, yeah, he did terrible stuff to me, I *know that*. It’s just—I froze up every time I saw him—the rest of *you* did all the work. Why the fuck can’t I be *strong* like *you*? ”

“You don’t have to face your abuser to be strong, Tommy. You’re *already* strong.”

Tommy shook his head. “I should be past this by now— it’s been *months* and every time I see something lime green I jump like a *pussy*—”

“I’ve been avoiding Quackity.”

Tommy blinked, head swiveling towards Wars. The man met his gaze, mouth set in a thin line.

“I can’t look at him without seeing the *other* him,” he admitted tersely. “Every time I hear his voice, my body—locks up. I freeze. I’m fucking *terrified* of him, but his only crime is sharing his future self’s face. Does that make me weak?”

“Fuck no,” Tommy snapped, then balked at the sudden vehemence in his voice. “I mean—that’s trauma, man, you don’t just recover from that in a day—”

“Then why are you beating yourself up over your reaction to Dream?”

Tommy opened his mouth. Wars raised an eyebrow. Tommy closed his mouth.

"Exactly," said Wars. He paused, looking thoughtful, then added, "We should schedule some appointments with Puffy."

Tommy squinted at him. “You think *therapy* is gonna help?”

“That’s the point of it, isn’t it?”

“No, like— isn’t it just kinda. Talking about feelings and shit?”

“... Yeah, we’re getting you therapy.”

Group Chat: we live(d) in tommys skull rent free

<Purpled> so I’ve taken the liberty of signing all of you up for some sessions with puffy

<Purpled> check dms for time and date

<Tubbo> fuck u i dont ened therapy

<Ranboo> honestly good idea

<Ranboo> thanks wars

<Purpled> dont mention it

<Purpled> tubbo i will physically drag you there

<Tubbo> i have many sharp pointy objedcts

<Purpled> puffy has a huge box of knickknacks. the fun ones you can take apart

<Tubbo> ok maybbe ill try one sessiwon

<TommyInnit> awwwwwwww purpled thank you so much

<TommyInnit> i am SO excited to talk about my many deaths with A COMPLETE STRANGER

<TommyInnit> ok not a complete stranger but

<TommyInnit> fuck yuo anyway

<Purpled> youll thank me later

They did thank Wars later.

Puffy was surprisingly chill about the whole “coming from the future” thing. She didn’t look at them with pity or horror whenever they brought up the worse parts—or maybe she was just that good at hiding it. Nevertheless, being able to recount the worst of what they’d gone through without fear of judgment was...freeing. Being able to speak about it to someone who held an outside perspective, who wasn’t fishing for information about the future—it was something they’d never known they needed.

It was still slow going, though. For every two steps forward, there would be one step back. Nights spent huddled against each other, unable to sleep. Days spent lying in bed, too weary to rise.

It was okay, though. They had each other, they were going to therapy, and though they weren’t *better* yet, they were getting there.

That was enough.

“Did you bring the snacks?”

“Of *course* I brought the snacks,” Wars scoffed, placing the baskets down at the center of the Community House’s roof. “I’m not *Ranboo*.”

Ran and Ranboo made twin noises of offense, though it was the older that spoke. “That was *one time*—”

“You literally brought a picnic basket and utensils! And left the food at home!”

“Listen, my memory is a little weird sometimes—”

“How do you remember to bring the utensils but not the food? How did you not even notice that there wasn’t *food* in the basket?”

“In my defense—”

“And why did you even put the utensils there in the first place?”

“*In my defense*,” Ran repeated, then proceeded to awkwardly stand there as he tried to come up with reasoning for his actions. After an extended pause, he said, “...it was funny?”

“He’s right, bossman,” said Underscore, slinging an arm around Wars’ shoulders—or trying to, he ended up just patting him on the shoulder when it became apparent he was a bit too short—it was fucking *hilarious*.”

Purpled, watching from the fringes of the interaction, let out a snort and mumbled something that sounded suspiciously like “short” under his breath. Then he looked startled, as though he hadn’t meant to say that out loud. Both Underscore and Tubbo slowly turned towards him, murder in their eyes.

“You got something to say, Purpled?” Tubbo asked, voice promising violence and death.

Purpled raised his hands and took a step back. “Nope, nothing.”

Tubbo beamed. Ranboo, standing behind him, looked relieved that he wouldn’t have to prevent a murder. Purpled looked like he couldn’t decide whether to be terrified or impressed. His older self simply nodded in approval, then set about laying out the picnic blanket on the roof.

“Ran and I used to play a game,” Underscore said, looking up at the sky. “Back in Snowchester, when we could still see the stars, we’d make up our own constellations and stories for them.”

Ran straightened, eyes going wide. “Oh, I remember that! You, uh, you...made up that one story about bees...taking over the server...”

“Yeah, that one was one of my favorites.” Underscore grinned. “These stars are different, but I’m *sure* we can make a fun story out of them!”

A slow, evil smile spread across Tommy’s face. He pointed up towards a cluster of six stars, arranged in a formation that could perhaps be generously called the outline of a UFO. “Hey. Look Purp, it’s Pog 3000.”

“Shut up and unpack the snacks,” Wars said without looking up. Purpled snickered, only to be pinned with a glare from his older self. “You too, mini-me. Come help.”

Purpled crossed his arms. “You’re not my boss.”

Wars raised an eyebrow. “People who help get first dibs on snacks.”

“Why didn’t you say that sooner?” Underscore complained, rushing over to the baskets with his younger self hot on his heels. Purpled and Tommy exchanged looks, came to a silent agreement, and lunged for the baskets at the same time. Tommy lost their impromptu race by two seconds, much to the smugness of Purpled. They proceeded to snipe good-naturedly at each other as they helped lay out the snacks, until Wars broke up the spat with two condescending headpats and a “Now now children, you’re both very intelligent.”

He received twin glares. Tommy and Purpled then proceeded to put their not inconsiderable might into keeping any and all snacks out of Wars’ reach for as long as possible, resulting in a playfight that dragged in the two Tubbos and ended with one very exasperated Ran withholding the half-unpacked snack baskets using his rather considerable height. “Behave,” he told his pouting friends as he held the baskets out of reach. “We can split the snacks evenly.”

Eventually, they got the picnic blankets laid out and the snacks divided haphazardly according to preference. Once everyone had managed to settle themselves into relatively comfortable positions (Tommy was not getting the warm fuzzies just because Tubbo and Ranboo wanted to sit with him, he was *not*), the game of make-your-own-constellations commenced.

It started out innocuous, with silly tales of talking animals or snack-stealing gremlins. But as time went on and they grew drowsier, the stories grew softer and somber. Tommy found Mushroom Henry in a cluster of blue-white stars, snoozing contentedly. Wars pointed out the starship tracing a wandering path below her. A three-legged dog galloped around them, chasing its tail. Tubbo framed a section of the sky between his hands and claimed that it was a portrait of Michael, all grown up and ready to fight god for fun and profit.

“He’ll win,” he added, smile wide but eyes fierce. “We’ll make sure he does.”

“We will,” Underscore agreed, though the way he’d turned his head to the right and squinted into the space between his fingers suggested that he wasn’t quite seeing the same picture as Tubbo. Ran’s choked-off laugh when he caught sight of Underscore’s odd position was summarily met with an elbow to the ribs.

And so they spoke well into the darkest hours of twilight, weaving stories into the stars. Gradually, the conversation hushed to sleepy murmurs. People began to drop off one by one, claimed by their exhaustion.

Tommy was the last one to fall asleep. He stared up at the distant pinpricks of light, gaze roving over the sky he’d spent so long looking at during those long, lonely months of exile. The cold, unfeeling stars he’d seen in Logstedshire no longer felt so cold and unfeeling—not with the taste of Wars’ slightly-burnt cookies lingering on his tongue, and Tubbo’s soft snoring filling his ears, and the warmth of his friends’ bodies pressing against his.

A small smile tugged at the corners of his lips. Tommy’s eyes flitted over the fading outline of the newly-dubbed Argos constellation one more time, then slipped shut.

He drifted away into a blissful, dreamless slumber, knowing that when he awoke in the morning, he wouldn’t be alone.

Chapter End Notes

And that’s a wrap <3

Thank you all so much for reading, and I hope you enjoyed my silly little idea :D may the rest of your week be absolutely fantastic!!

Please leave a kudos or comment on the way out if you feel comfortable!

EDIT: _andemonium made [this hilarious \(and very accurate\) TikTok](#)! Go check it out :D

End Notes

Comments & kudos are <3!

Works inspired by this one

[Adventures of the Damned](#) by [sprayedwithcrab](#)

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!